

AN  
APOLOGY.  
FOR THE  
LIFE  
OF

Mr. COLLEY CIBBER, Comedian,  
AND

Late PATENTEE of the Theatre-Royal.

With an Historical View of the STAGE during his  
OWN TIME.

---

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

---

---

*How oft*  
*View'd his, with pass'd priors fruit.* Mart. lib. 2.

*When Years no Part of active Life retain,*  
*'Tis Youth renew'd, to laugh 'em o'er again.*  
Anonym.

---

DUBLIN:  
Re-printed by and for GEORGE FAULKNER.  
M DCC XL.



AD 100

100

100

100

100

100

100

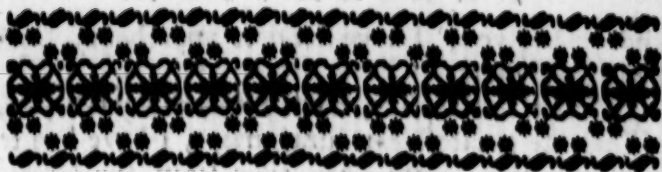
100

100

100

100

100



T O A

## CERTAIN GENTLEMAN.

S I R,



BECAUSE I know it would give you less Concern, to find your Name in an impertinent Satyre, than before the daintiest Dedication of a modern Author, I conceal it.

Let me talk never so idly to you, this way ; you are, at least, under no necessity of taking it to yourself : Nor when I boast of your Favours, need you blush to have bestow'd them. Or I may now give you all the Attributes, that raise a wise, and good-natur'd Man, to Esteem, and Happiness, and not to be censured as a Flatterer by my own or your Enemies.----I place my own first ; because as they are the greater Number, I am afraid of not paying the greater Respect to them. Yours, if such there are, I imagine are too well-bred to declare themselves : But as there is no Hazard, or visible Terror, in an Attack, upon my defenceless Station, my Censurers have generally been Persons of an intrepid Sincerity. Having therefore shut the Door against them, while I am thus privately

## DEDICATION.

addressing you, I have little to apprehend, from either of them.

Under this Shelter, then, I may safely tell you, That the greatest Encouragement, I have had to publish this Work, has risen from the several Hours of Patience you have lent me, at the Reading it. It is true, I took the Advantage of your Leisure, in the Country, where moderate Matters serve for Amusement; and there indeed, how far your Good-nature, for an old Acquaintance, or your Reluctance to put the Vanity of an Author out of Countenance, may have carried you, I cannot be sure; and yet Appearances give me stronger Hopes: For was not the Complaisance of a whole Evening's Attention, as much as an Author of Importance ought to have expected? Why then was I desired the next Day to give you a second Lecture? Or why was I kept a third Day, with you to tell you more of the same Story? If these Circumstances have made me vain, shall I say, Sir, you are accountable for them? No, Sir, I will rather so far flatter myself, as to suppose it possible, that your having been a Lover of the Stage (and one of those few good Judges who know the Use, and Value of it under a right Regulation) might incline you to think so copious an Account of it a less tedious Amusement, than it may naturally be, to others of different good Sense, who may have less Concern, or Taste for it. But be all this as it may; the Brat is now born, and rather than see it starve, upon the Bare Parish Provision, I chuse thus clandestinely, to drop it at your Door, that it may exercise One of your Many Virtues, your Charity, in supporting it.

If

## D E D I C A T I O N .

If the World were to know, into whose Hands I have thrown it, their Regard to its Patron might incline them, to treat it as One of his Family : But in the Consciousness of what I *am*, I chuse not, Sir, to say who you *are*. If your Equal in Rank, were to do publick Justice to your Character, then indeed, the Concealment of your Name might be an unnecessary Diffidence : But am I, Sir, of Consequence enough, in any Guise, to do Honour to Mr.---? Were I to set him in the most laudable Lights, that Truth, and good Sense could give him, or his own Likeness would require, my officious Mite would be lost in that general Esteem, and Regard, which People of the first Consequence, even of different Parties, have a Pleasure, in paying him. Encomiums to Superiors, from Authors of lower Life, as they are naturally liable to Suspicion, can add very little Lustre to what before was visible to the publick Eye : Such Offerings (to use the Stile they are generally dress'd in) like *Pagan* Incense, evaporate, on the Altar, and rather gratify the Priest, than the Deity.

But you, Sir, are to be approach'd in Terms, within the Reach of common Sense : The honest Oblation of a chearful Heart, is as much as you desire, or I am able to bring you : A Heart, that has just Sense enough, to mix Respect, with Intimacy, and is never more delighted, than when your rural Hours of Leisure admit me, with all my laughing Spirits, to be my idle self, and in the whole Day's Possession of you ! Then, indeed, I have Reason to be vain ; I am, then, distinguish'd, by a Pleasure too great, to be conceal'd, and could

## DEDICATION.

almost pity the Man of graver Merit, that dares not receive it, with the same unguarded Transport ! This Nakedness of Temper the World may place, in what Rank of Folly, or Weakness they please ; but till Wisdom, can give me something, that will make me more heartily happy, I am content, to be gaz'd at, as I am, without lessening my Respect, for those, whose Passions may be more soberly cover'd.

Yet, Sir, will I not deceive you ; 'tis not the Lustre of your publick Merit, the Affluence of your Fortune, your high Figure in Life, nor those honourable Distinctions, which you had rather deserve than be told of, that have so many Years made my plain Heart hang after you : These are but incidental Ornaments, that, 'tis true, may be of Service to you, in the World's Opinion ; and though, as one among the Crowd, I may rejoice, that Providence has so deservedly bestow'd them ; yet my particular Attachment has risen from a meer natural, and more engaging Charm, The Agreeable Companion ! Nor is my Vanity half so much gratified, in the *Honour*, as my Sense is in the *Delight* of your Society ! When I see you lay aside the Advantages of Superiority, and by your own Chearfulness of Spirits, call out all that Nature has given me to meet them ; then 'tis I taste you ! then Life runs high ! I desire ! I possess you !

Yet, Sir, in this distinguish'd Happiness, I give not up my farther Share of that Pleasure, or of that Right I have to look upon you, with the publick Eye, and to join in the general Regard so unanimously pay'd to that uncommon Virtue, your *Integrity* ! This, Sir, the World allows so conspicuous a Part of your Character, that, how-

## DEDICATION.

however invidious the Merit, neither the rude License of Detraction, nor the Prejudice of Party, has ever, once, thrown on it the least Impeachment, or Reproach. This is that commanding Power, that in publick Speaking, makes you heard with such Attention! This it is, that discourages, and keeps silent the Insinuations of Prejudice, and Suspicion; and almost renders your Eloquence an unnecessary Aid, to your Assertions: Even your Opponents, conscious of your *Integrity*, hear you rather as a Witness, than an Orator---- But this, Sir, is drawing you too near the Light, *Integrity* is too particular a Virtue to be cover'd with a general Application. Let me therefore only talk to you as at *Tusculum* (for so I will call that sweet Retreat, which your own Hands have rais'd) where like the fam'd Orator of old, when publick Cares permit, you pass so many rational, unbending Hours: There! and at such Times, to have been admitted, still plays in my Memory, more like a fictitious, than a real Enjoyment! How many golden Evenings, in that Theatrical Paradise of water'd Lawns, and hanging Groves, have I walk'd, and prated down the Sun, in social Happiness! Whether the Retreat of *Cicero*, in Cost, Magnificence, or curious Luxury of Antiquities, might not out-blaze the *simplex Munditiis*, the modest Ornaments of your *Villa*, is not within my reading to determine: But that the united Power of Nature, Art, or Elegance of Taste, could have thrown so many varied Objects, into a more delightful Harmony, is beyond my Conception.

When I consider you, in this View, and as the Gentleman of Eminence, surrounded with  
the



## DEDICATION.

the general Benevolence of Mankind ; I rejoice, Sir, for you, and for myself ; to see *You*, in this particular Light of Merit, and myself, sometimes, admitted to my more than equal Share of you.

If this *Apology* for my past Life, discourages you not, from holding me, in your usual Favour, let me quit this greater Stage, the World, whenever I may, I shall think this the best-acted Part of any I have undertaken, since you first condescended to laugh with,

S I R,

*Your most obedient,*

*most oblig'd, and*

*most humble Servant,*

November 6.  
1739.

COLLEY CIBBER.



# THE CONTENTS.

## CHAP. I.

**T**HE Introduction. The Author's Birth. Various Fortune at School. Not lik'd by those he lov'd there. Why. A Digression upon Raillery. The Use and Abuse of it. The Comforts of Folly. Vanity of Greatness, Laughing, no bad Philosophy. page 1.

## CHAP. II.

He that writes of himself, not easily tir'd. Boys may give Men Lessons. The Author's Preferment at School attended with Misfortunes. The Danger of Merit among Equals. Of Satyrists and Backbiters. What Effect they have had upon the Author. Stanzas publish'd by himself against himself. p. 18.

## CHAP. III.

The Author's several Chances for the Church, the Court, and the Army. Going to the University. Met the Revolution at Nottingham. Took Arms on that Side. What he saw of it. A few Political Thoughts. Fortune willing to do for him. His Neglect of her. The Stage preferr'd to all her Favours. The Profession of an Actor consider'd. The Misfortunes and Advantages of it. P. 34.

## CHAP. IV.

A short View of the Stage, from the Year 1660. to the Revolution. The King's and Duke's Company united, compos'd the best Set of English Actors yet known. Their several Theatrical Characters. P. 53.

## CHAP. V.

The Theatrical Characters of the Principal Actors, in the Year 1690 continu'd. A few Words to Critical Auditors. P. 72.  
The

## The CONTENTS.

### CHAP. VI.

*The Author's first Step upon the Stage. His Discouragements. The best Actors in Europe, ill us'd. A Revolution, in their Favour. King William grants them a License to act in Lincolns Inn Fields. The Author's Distress, in being thought a worse Actor, than a Poet. Reduc'd to write a Part for himself. His Success. More Remarks, upon Theatrical Action. Some, upon himself.* p. 105.

### CHAP. VII.

*The State of the Stage continued. The Occasion of Wilks's commencing Actor. His Success. Facts relating to his Theatrical Talent. Actors more or less esteem'd from their private Characters.* p. 131.

### CHAP. VIII.

*The Patentee of Drury-Lane wiser than his Actors. His particular Management. The Author continues to write Plays. Why. The best dramatick Poets censur'd, by J. Collier, in his Short View of the Stage. It has a good Effect. The Master of the Revels, from that time, cautious in his licensing new Plays. A Complaint against him. His Authority founded upon Custom only. The late Law for fixing that Authority, in a proper Person, consider'd.* p. 152.

### CHAP. IX.

*A small Apology, for writing on. The different State of the two Companies. Wilks invited over from Dublin. Estcourt, from the same Stage, the Winter following. Mrs. Oldfield's first Admission to the Theatre-Royal. Her Character. The great Theatre in the Hay-Market built, for Betterton's Company. It answered not their Expectation. Some Observations upon it. A Theatrical State Secret.* p. 172.

### CHAP.

## The CONTENTS.

### CHAP. X.

*The recruited Actors, in the Hay-Market, encourag'd by a Subscription. Drury-Lane, under a particular Management. The Power of a Lord-Chamberlain, over the Theatres, consider'd. How it had been formerly exercis'd. A Digression to Tragick Authors.*

P. 193.

### CHAP. XI.

*Some Chimærical Thoughts of making the Stage useful: Some, to its Reputation. The Patent unprofitable, to all the Proprietors, but one. A fourth Part of it given away to Colonel Brett. A Digression to his Memory. The two Companies of Actors reunited, by his Interest, and Management. The first Direction of Opera's only, given to Mr. Swiney.*

p. 207.

### CHAP. XII.

*A Short View of the Opera, when first divided from the Comedy. Plays recover their Credit. The old Patentee uneasy at their Success. Why. The Occasion of Colonel Brett's throwing up his Share in the Patent. The Consequences of it. Anecdotes of Goodman the Actor. The Rate of favourite Actors, in his Time. The Patentees, by endeavouring to reduce their Price, lose them all a second time. The principal Comedians return to the Hay-Market in Shares with Swiney. They alter that Theatre. The original and present Form of the Theatre in Drury-Lane, compar'd. Opera's fall off. The Occasion of it. Farther Observations upon them. The Patentee dispossest'd of Drury-Lane Theatre. Mr. Collier, with a New Licence, heads the Remains of that Company.*

p. 224.

### CHAP. XIII.

*The Patentee, having now no Actors, rebuilds the new Theatre in Lincoln's-Inn Fields. A Guest at his Reasons for it. More Changes, in the State of the Stage. The Beginning of its better Days, under the*

Trium-

## The CONTENTS.

Triumvirate of *Actors*. *A Sketch of their governing Characters.*

P. 247.

### CHAP. XIV.

*The Stage, in its highest Prosperity. The Managers not without Errors. Of what Kind. Cato first acted. What brought it to the Stage. The Company go to Oxford. Their Success and different Auditors there. Booth made a Sharer. Dogget objects to him. Quits the Stage upon his Admittance. That not his true Reason. What was Dogget's Theatrical Character.*

p. 260

### CHAP. XV.

*Sir Richard Steele succeeds Collier, in the Theatre-Royal. Lincoln's-Inn Fields House rebuilt. The Patent restored. Eight Actors at once desert, from the King's Company. Why. A new Patent obtain'd by Sir Richard Steele, and assign'd in Shares, to the managing Actors of Drury-Lane. Of modern Pantomimes. The Rise of them. Vanity invincible, and asham'd. The Non-juror acted. The Author, not forgiven, and rewarded for it.*

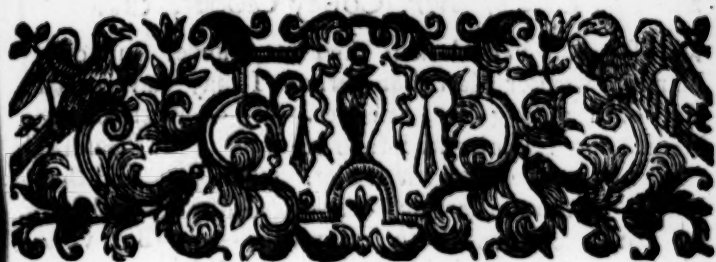
p. 289.

### CHAP. XVI.

*The Author steps out of his Way. Pleads his Theatrical Cause, in Chancery. Carries it. Plays acted at Hampton-Court. Theatrical Anecdotes in former Reigns. Ministers, and Managers always consider'd. The Difficulty of supplying the Stage, with good Actors, consider'd. Courtiers, and Comedians govern'd by the same Passions. Examples of both. The Author quits the Stage. Why.*

p. 306.

A N



A N  
A P O L O G Y  
F O R T H E  
L I F E o f M r . C O L L E Y C I B B E R , & c .

---

C H A P . I .

*The Introduction. The Author's Birth. Various Fortune at School. Not lik'd by those he lov'd there. Why. A Digressi- on upon Raillery. The Use and Abuse of it. The Comforts of Folly. Vanity of Greatness. Laughing, no bad Philoso- phy.*

**Y** O U know, Sir, I have often told you, that one time or other I should give the Publick some Memoirs of my own Life ; at which you have never fail'd to laugh, like a Friend, without saying a word to dissuade me from it ; concluding, I suppose, that such a wild Thought could not possibly require a serious Answer. But you see I was in earnest. And now you  
B will

## 2 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

will say, the World will find me, under my own Hand, a weaker Man than perhaps I may have pass'd for, even among my Enemies. — With all my Heart! my Enemies will then read me with Pleasure, and you, perhaps, with Envy, when you find that Follies, without the Reproach of Guilt upon them, are not inconsistent with Happiness. — But why make my Follies publick? Why not? I have pass'd my Time very pleasantly with them, and I don't recollect that they have ever been hurtful to any other Man living. Even admitting they were injudiciously chosen, would it not be Vanity in me to take Shame to myself for not being found a Wise Man? Really, Sir, my Appetites were in too much haste to be happy, to throw away my Time in pursuit of a Name I was sure I could never arrive at.

Now the Follies I frankly confess, I look upon as, in some measure, discharged; while those I conceal are still keeping the Account open between me and my Conscience. To me the Fatigue of being upon a continual Guard to hide them, is more than the Reputation of being without them can repay. If this be Weakness, *defendit numerus*, I have such comfortable Numbers on my side, that were all Men to blush, that are not Wise, I am afraid, in Ten, Nine Parts of the World ought to be out of Countenance: But since that sort of Modesty is what they don't care to come into, why should I be afraid of being star'd at, for not being particular? Or if the Particularity lies in owning my Weakness, will my wisest Reader be so inhumane as not to pardon it? But if there should be such a one, let me, at least, beg him to shew me that strange Man, who is perfect! Is any one more unhappy, more ridiculous, than he who is always labouring to be thought so, or that is impatient, when he is not thought so? Having brought myself to be easy, under whatever the World may say of my Undertaking, you may still ask me, why I give myself all this trouble? Is it for Fame, or Profit to myself, or Use or Delight to others? For all these Considerations I have  
neither



neither Fondness nor Indifference : If I obtain none of them, the Amusement; at worst, will be a Reward that must constantly go along with the Labour. But behind all this, there is something inwardly inciting, which I cannot express in few Words; I must therefore a little make bold with your Patience.

A Man who has pass'd above Forty Years of his Life upon a Theatre, where he has never appear'd to be Himself, may have naturally excited the Curiosity of his Spectators to know what he really was, when in no body's Shape but his own; and whether he, who by his Profession had so long been ridiculing his Benefactors, might not, when the Coat of his Profession was off, deserve to be laugh'd at himself; or from his being often seen in, the most flagrant, and immoral Characters; whether he might not see as great a Rogue, when he look'd into the Glass himself, as when he held it to others.

It was, doubtless, from a Supposition that this sort of Curiosity wou'd compensate their Labours, that so many hasty Writers have been encourag'd to publish the Lives of the late Mrs. *Olafeld*, Mr. *Wills*, and Mr. *Booth*, in less time after their Deaths than one cou'd suppose it cost to transcribe them.

Now, Sir, when my Time comes, lest they shou'd think it worth while to handle my Memory with the same Freedom, I am willing to prevent its being so odly besmear'd (or at best but flatly white-wash'd) by taking upon me to give the Publick This, as true a Picture of myself as natural Vanity will permit me to draw : For, to promise you that I shall never be vain, were a Promise that, like a Looking-glass too large, might break itself in the making : Nor am I sure I ought wholly to avoid that Imputation, because if Vanity be one of my natural Features, the Portrait wou'd not be like me without it. In a Word, I may palliate, and soften, as much as I please; but, upon an honest Examination of my Heart, I am afraid the same Vanity which makes even homely People employ Painters to preserve a flattering Record of their



#### 4      *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

Persons, has seduced me to print off this *Chiara Oscura* of my Mind.

And when I have done it, you may reasonably ask me, of what Importance can the History of my private Life be to the Publick? To this, indeed, I can only make you a ludicrous Answer, which is, That the Publick very well knows, my Life has not been a private one; that I have been employ'd in their Service, ever since many of their Grandfathers were young Men; And tho' I have voluntarily laid down my Post, they have a sort of Right to enquire into my Conduct, (for which they have so well paid me) and to call for the Account of it, during my Share of Administration in the State of the Theatre. This Work, therefore, which, I hope, they will not expect a Man of my hasty Head shou'd confine to any regular Method: (For I shall make no scruple of leaving my History, when I think a Digression may make it lighter, for my Reader's Digestion.) This Work, I say, shall not only contain the various Impressions of my Mind, (as in *Louis the Fourteenth* his Cabinet you have seen the growing Medals of his Person from Infancy to Old Age,) but shall likewise include with them the *Theatrical History of my Own Time*, from my first Appearance on the Stage to my last *Exit*.

If then what I shall advance on that Head, may any ways contribute to the Prosperity or Improvement of the Stage in being, the Publick must of consequence have a Share in its Utility.

This, Sir, is the best Apology I can make for being my own Biographer. Give me leave therefore to open the first Scene of my Life, from the very Day I came into it; and tho' (considering my Profession) I have no reason to be ashamed of my Original; yet I am afraid a plain dry Account of it, will scarce admit of a better Excuse than what my Brother *Bays* makes for Prince *Prettyman* in the *Rehearsal*, viz. *I only do it, for fear I should be thought to be no body's Son at all;* for if I have led a worthless Life, the Weight of my Pedigree will not add an Ounce to my intrinsic Value.

But

## The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c. 5

But be the Inference what it will, the simple Truth is this.

I was born in London, on the 6th of November, 1671, in Southampton-Street, facing Southampton-House. My Father, *Cainus Gabriel Cibber*, was a Native of *Holstein*, who came into England some time before the Restoration of King *Charles II.* to follow his Profession, which was that of a Statuary, &c. The *Basss Reliefs* on the Pedestal of the Great Column in the City, and the two Figures of the *Lunatics*, the *Raving* and the *Melancholy*, over the Gates of *Bethlehem-Hospital*, are no ill Monuments of his Fame as an Artist. My Mother was the Daughter of *William Colley*, Esq; of a very ancient Family of *Glainston* in *Rutlandshire*, where she was born. My Mother's Brother, *Edward Colley*, Esq; (who gave me my Christian Name) being the last Heir Male of it, the Family is now extinct. I shall only add, that in *Wright's History of Rutlandshire*, publish'd in 1684, the *Colley's* are recorded as Sheriffs and Members of Parliament from the Reign of *Henry VII.* to the latter end of *Charles I.* in whose Cause chiefly Sir *Antony Colley*, my Mother's Grandfather, sunk his Estate from Three Thousand to about Three Hundred *per Annum*.

In the Year 1682, at little more than ten Years of Age, I was sent to the Free-School of *Grantham* in *Lincolnshire*, where I staid till I got through it, from the lowest Form to the uppermost. And such Learning as that School could give me, is the most I pretend to (which, tho' I have not utterly forgot, I can not say I have much improv'd by Study) but even there I remember I was the same inconsistent Creature I have been ever since! always in full Spirits, in some small Capacity to do right, but in a more frequent Alacrity to do wrong; and consequently often under a worse Character than I wholly deserv'd: A giddy Negligence always possess'd me, and so much, that I remember I was once whip'd for my *Theme*, tho' my Master told me, at the same time, what was good of it was better than any Boy's in the Form. And (whatever

6 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

Shame it may be to own it) I have observ'd the same odd Fate has frequently attended the course of my latter Conduct in Life. The unskillful openness, or in plain Terms, the Indiscretion I have always acted with from my Youth, has drawn more ill-will towards me, than Men of worse Morals and more Wit might have met with. My Ignorance, and want of Jealousy of Mankind has been so strong, that it is with Reluctance I even yet believe any Person, I am acquainted with, can be capable of Envy, Malice, or Ingratitude: And to shew you what a Mortification it was to me, in my very boyish Days, to find myself mistaken, give me leave to tell you a School Story.

A great Boy, near the Head taller than my self, in some wrangle at play had insulted me; upon which I was fool-hardy enough to give him a box on the Ear; the blow was soon return'd with another, that brought me under him, and at his Mercy. Another Lad, whom I really lov'd, and thought a good natur'd one, cry'd out with some warmth, to my Antagonist (while I was down) beat him, beat him soundly! This so amaz'd me, that I lost all my Spirits to resist, and burst into Tears! When the Fray was over I took my Friend aside, and ask'd him, how he came to be so earnestly against me? To which, with some glouting Confusion, he reply'd, because you are always jeering, and making a Jest of me to every Boy in the School. Many a Mischief have I brought upon myself by the same Folly in riper Life. Whatever Reason I had to reproach my Companion's declaring against me, I had none to wonder at it, while I was so often hurting him: Thus I deserv'd his Enmity, by my not having Sense enough to know I *had* hurt him; and he hated me, because he had not Sense enough to know, that I never *intended* to hurt him.

As this is the first remarkable Error of my Life I can recollect, I cannot pass it by without throwing out some farther Reflections upon it; whether flat or spirited, new or common, false or true, right or wrong, they will be still my own, and consequently like me; I will therefore boldly go on; for I am only oblig'd

blig'd to give you my own, and not a good Picture, to shew as well the Weakness, as the Strength of my Understanding. It is not on what I write, but on my Reader's Curiosity I rely to be read through: At worst, though the Impartial may be tir'd, the Ill-natur'd (no small number) I know will see the bottom of me.

What I observ'd then, upon my having undesignedly provok'd my School-Friend into an Enemy, is a common Case in Society; Errors of this kind often sour the Blood of Acquaintance into an inconceivable Aversion, where it is little suspected. It is not enough to say of your Raillery, that you intended no Offence; if the Person you offer it to has either a wrong Head, or wants a Capacity to make that distinction, it may have the same effect as the Intention of the grossest Injury: And in reality, if you know his Parts are too slow to return it in kind, it is a vain and idle Inhumanity, and sometimes draws the Aggressor into difficulties not easily got out of: Or to give the Case more scope, suppose your Friend may have a passive Indulgence for your Mirth, if you find him silent at it; tho' you were as intrepid as *Cæsar*, there can be no Excuse for your not leaving it off. When you are conscious that your Antagonist can give as well as take, then indeed the smarter the Hit the more agreeable the Party: A Man of chearful Sense, among Friends will never be grave upon an Attack of this kind, but rather thank you that you have given him a Right to be even with you: There are few Men (tho' they may be Masters of both) that on such occasions had not rather shew their Parts than their Courage, and the Preference is just; a Bull-Dog may have one, and only a Man can have the other. Thus it happens, that in the coarse Merriment of common People, when the Jest begins to swell into earnest, for want of this Election you may observe, he that has least Wit generally gives the first blow. Now, as among the better sort, a readiness of Wit is not always a Sign of intrinsic Merit; so the want of that readiness is no Reproach to a Man of plain Sense and Civility, who therefore (methinks)

## 8 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

(methinks) should never have these lengths of Liberty taken with him. Wit there becomes absurd, if not insolent; ill-natur'd I am sure it is, which Imputation a generous Spirit will always avoid, for the same reason that a Man of real Honour will never send a Challenge to a Cripple. The inward Wounds that are given by the inconsiderate Insults of Wit, to those that want it, are as dangerous as those given by Oppression to Inferiors; as long in healing, and perhaps never forgiven. There is besides (and little worse than this) a mutual Grossness in Raillery, that sometimes is more painful to the Hearers that are not concern'd in it, than to the Persons engag'd. I have seen a couple of these clumsy Combatants drub one another with as little Manners or Mercy as if they had two Flails in their Hands; Children at play with Case-knives could not give you more Apprehension of their doing one another a Mischief. And yet when the Contest has been over, the Boobys have look'd round them for Approbation, and upon being told they were admirably well match'd, have sat down (bedawb'd as they were) contented, at making it a drawn Battle. After all that I have said, there is no clearer way of giving Rules for Raillery than by Example.

There are two Persons now living, who, tho' very different in their manner, are, as far as my Judgment reaches, complete Masters of it; the one of a more polite and extensive Imagination, the other of a Knowledge more closely useful to the Business of Life: The one gives you perpetual Pleasure, and seems always to be taking it; the other seems to take none, till his Business is over, and then gives you as much as if Pleasure were his only Business. The one enjoys his Fortune, the other thinks it first necessary to make it; though that he will enjoy it then, I cannot be positive, because when a Man has once pick'd up more than he wants, he is apt to think it a Weakness to suppose he has enough. But as I don't remember ever to have seen these Gentlemen in the same Company, you must give me leave to take them separately.

The



The first of them, then, has a Title, and ——— no matter what ; I am not to speak of the great, but the happy part of his Character, and in this one single light ; not of his being an illustrious, but a delightful Companion.

In Conversation he is seldom silent but when he is attentive, nor ever speaks without exciting the Attention of others ; and tho' no Man might with less displeasure to his Hearers, engross the Talk of the Company, he has a Patience in his Vivacity that chuses to divide it, and rather gives more Freedom than he takes ; his sharpest Replies having a mixture of Politeness that few have the command of ; his Expression is easy, short, and clear ; a stiff or study'd Word never comes from him ; it is in a simplicity of Style that he gives the highest Surprise, and his Ideas are always adapted to the Capacity and Taste of the Person he speaks to : Perhaps you will understand me better if I give you a particular Instance of it. A Person at the University, who from being a Man of Wit, easily became one of his Acquaintance there, from that Acquaintance found no difficulty in being made one of his Chaplains : This Person afterwards leading a Life that did no great Honour to his Cloth, oblig'd his Patron to take some gentle notice of it ; but as his Patron knew the Patient was squeamish, he was introduc'd to sweeten the Medicine to his Taste, and therefore with a smile of good-humour told him, that if to the many Vices he had already, he would give himself the trouble to add one more, he did not doubt but his Reputation might still be set up again. Sir *Crape*, who could have no Aversion to so pleasant a Dose, desiring to know what it might be, was answered, *Hypocrisy, Doctor, only a little Hypocrisy!* This plain Reply can need no Comment ; but *ex pede Herculem*, he is every where proportionable. I think I have heard him since say, the Doctor thought Hypocrisy so detestable a Sin that he dy'd without committing it. In a word, this Gentleman gives Spirit to Society the Moment he comes into it; and whenever he leaves it, they who have Business have then leisure to go about it.

Having

10 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

Having often had the Honour to be myself the Butt of his Raillery, I must own I have receiv'd more Pleasure from his lively manner of raising the Laugh against me, than I could have felt from the smoothest flattery of a serious Civility. Tho' Wit flows from him with as much ease as common Sense from another, he is so little elated with the Advantage he may have over you, that whenever your good Fortune gives it against him, he seems more pleas'd with it on your side than his own. The only advantage he makes of his Superiority of Rank is, that by always waving it himself, his inferior finds he is under the greater Obligation not to forget it.

When the Conduct of social Wit is under such Regulations, how delightful must those *Convivia*, those Meals of Conversation be, where such a Member presides; who can with so much ease (as *Shakespeare* phrases it) *set the Table in a roar*. I am in no pain that these imperfect Out-lines will be apply'd to the Person I mean, because every one that has the Happiness to know him, must know how much more in this particular Attitude is wanting to be like him.

The other Gentleman, whose bare Interjections of Laughter have Humour in them, is so far from having a Title, that he has lost his real name, which some Years ago he suffer'd his Friends to railly him out of; in lieu of which they have equipp'd him with one they thought had a better sound in good Company. He is the first Man of so sociable a Spirit, that I ever knew capable of quitting the Allurements of Wit and Pleasure, for a strong Application to Business; in his Youth (for there was a Time when he was young) he set out in all the hey-day Expences of a modish Man of Fortune; but finding himself over-weighted with Appetites, he grew restiff, kick'd up in the middle of the Course, and turn'd his Back upon his Frolicks abroad, to think of improving his Estate at home: In order to which he clapt Collars upon his Coach-horses, and that their Mettle might not run over other People, he ty'd a Plough to their Tails, which tho' it might give them a more slovenly Air, would enable him



*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 11

him to keep them fatter in a foot pace, with a whistling Peasant beside them, than in a full trot, with a hot-headed Coach-man behind them. In these unpolite Amusements he has laugh'd like a Rake, and look'd about him like a Farmer for many Years. As his Rank and Station often find him in the best Company, his easy Humour, whenever he is called to it, can still make himself the Fiddle of it.

And tho' some say, he looks upon the Follies of the World like too severe a Philosopher, yet he rather chuses to laugh, than to grieve at them; to pass his time therefore more easily in it, he often endeavours to conceal himself, by assuming the Air and Taste of a Man in fashion; so that his only Uneasiness seems to be, that he can't quite prevail with his Friends to think him a worse Manager, than he really is; for they carry their Raillery to such a height, that it sometimes rises to a Charge of downright Avarice against him. Upon which head it is no easy matter to be more merr-y upon him, than he will be upon himself. Thus while he sets that Infirmary in a pleasant Light, he so disarms your Prejudice that, if he has it not, you can't find in your Heart to wish he were without it. Whenever he is attack'd where he seems to lie so open, if his Wit happens not to be ready for you, he receives you with an assenting Laugh, till he has gain'd time to whet it sharp enough for a Reply, which seldom turns out to his disadvantage. If you are too strong for him (which may possibly happen from his being oblig'd to defend the weak side of the Question) his last Resource is to join in the Laugh, till he has got himself off by an ironical Applause of your Superiority.

If I were capable of Envy, what I have observ'd of this Gentleman would certainly incline me to it; for sure to get through the necessary Cares of Life, with a Train of Pleasures at our Heels, in vain calling after us, to give a constant Preference to the Business of the Day, and yet be able to laugh while we are about it, to make even Society the subservient Reward of it, is a State of Happiness which the gravest Precepts of moral Wisdom will not easily teach us to exceed. When

12 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

I speak of Happiness, I go no higher than that which is contain'd in the World we now tread upon; and when I speak of Laughter, I don't simply mean that which every Oaf is capable of, but that which has its sensible Motive and proper Season, which is not more limited than recommended by that indulgent Philosophy,

*Cum ratione insanire.*

When I look into my present Self, and afterwards cast my Eye round all my Hopes, I don't see any one Pursuit of them that shou'd so reasonably rouse me out of a Nod in my Great Chair, as a call to those agreeable Parties I have sometimes the Happiness to mix with, where I always assert the equal Liberty of leaving them, when my Spirits have done their best with them.

Now, Sir, as I have been making my way for above Forty Years through a Crowd of Cares, (all which, by the Favour of Providence, I have honestly got rid of) is it a time of Day for me to leave off these Fooleries, and to set up a new Character? Can it be worth my while to waste my Spirits, to bake my Blood, with serious Contemplations, and perhaps impair my Health, in the fruitless Study of advancing myself into the better Opinion of those very—very few Wise Men that are as old as I am? No, the Part I have acted in real Life, shall be all of a piece.

*—Servetur ad imum,  
Qualis ab incepto processerit.*

Hor.

I will not go out of my Character, by straining to be wiser than I *can* be, or by being more affectedly pensive than I *need* be; whatever I am, Men of Sense will know me to be, put on what Disguise I will; I can no more put off my Follies, than my Skin; I have often try'd, but they stick too close to me; nor am I sure my Friends are displeas'd with them; for, besides that in this Light I afford them frequent matter of Mirth, they may possibly be less uneasy at their own Foibles,

Foibles, when they have so old a Precedent to keep them in countenance : Nay, there are some frank enough to confess, they envy what they laugh at ; and when I have seen others, whose Rank and fortune have laid a sort of Restraint upon their Liberty of pleasing their Company, by pleasing themselves, I have said softly to myself, — Well, there is some Advantage in having neither Rank nor Fortune ! Not but there are among them a third Sort, who have the particular Happiness of unbending into the very Wantonness of Good-humour, without depreciating their Dignity : He that is not Master of that Freedom, let his Condition be never so exalted, must still want something to come up to the Happiness of his Inferiors who enjoy it. If *Socrates* cou'd take pleasure in playing at *Even or Odd* with his Children, or *Agésilas* divert himself in riding the Hobby-horse with them, am I oblig'd to be as eminent as either of them before I am as frolicksome ? If the Emperor *Adrian*, near his death, cou'd play with his very Soul, his *Animula*, &c. and regret that it cou'd be no longer companionable ; if Greatness, at the same time, was not the Delight he was so loth to part with, sure then these chearful Amusements I am contending for, must have no inconsiderable share in our Happiness ; he that does not chuse to live his own way, suffers others to chuse for him. Give me the Joy I always took in the End of an old Song,

*My Mind, my Mind is a Kingdom to me !*

If I can please myself with my own Follies, have not I a plentiful Provision for Life ? If the World thinks me a Trifler, I don't desire to break in upon their Wisdom ; let them call me any Fool, but an Unchearful one ! I live as I write ; while my Way amuses me, it's as well as I wish it ; when another writes better, I can like him too, tho' he shou'd not like me. Not our great Imitator of *Horace* himself can have more Pleasure in Writing his Verses, than I have in reading them, tho' I sometimes find myself there (as *Shakespeare* terms it) *dispraisingly* spoken of : If he is a little free with

C

me,

14 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

me, I am generally in good company, he is as blunt with my Betters; so that even here I might laugh in my turn. My Superiors, perhaps, may be mended by him; but, for my part, I own myself incorrigible: I look upon my Follies as the best part of my Fortune, and am more concern'd to be a good Husband of them, than of that; nor do I believe I shall ever be rhim'd out of them. And, if I don't mistake, I am supported in my way of thinking by *Horace* himself, who, in excuse of a loose Writer, says,

*Prætulerim scriptor delirus, inersque videri,  
Dum mea delectent, mala me, aut denique fallant,  
Quam sapere, et ringi—*

which, to speak of myself as a loose Philosopher, I have thus ventur'd to imitate:

*Me, while my laughing Follies can deceive,  
Blest in the dear Delirium let me live,  
Rather than wisely know my Wants, and grieve.* }

We had once a merry Monarch of our own, who thought cheerfulness so valuable a Blessing, that he would have quitted one of his Kingdoms where he cou'd not enjoy it: where, among many other hard Conditions they had ty'd him to, his sober Subjects wou'd not suffer him to laugh on a *Sunday*; and tho' this might not be the avow'd Cause of his Elopement, I am not sure, had he had no other, that this alone might not have serv'd his turn; at least, he has my hearty Approbation either way; for had I been under the same Restriction, tho' my staying were to have made me his Successor, I shou'd rather have chosen to follow him.

How far his Subjects might be in the right, is not my Affair to determine; perhaps they were wiser than the Frogs in the Fable, and rather chose to have a Log, than a Stork for their King; yet I hope it will be no Offence to say, that King *Log* himself must have made but a very simple Figure in History.

The

The Man who chuses never to laugh, or whose be-  
calm'd Passions know no Motion, seems to me only in  
the quiet State of a green Tree ; he vegetates, 'tis  
true, but shall we say he lives ? Now, Sir, for Amuse-  
ment.—Reader, take heed ! for I find a strong im-  
pulse to talk impertinently ; if therefore you are not  
as fond of seeing, as I am of shewing myself in all  
my Lights, you may turn over two Leaves together,  
and leave what follows to those who have more Curio-  
sity, and less to do with their Time, than you have.  
—As I was saying then, let us, for Amusement, ad-  
vance this, or any other Prince, to the most glorious  
Throne, mark out his Empire in what Clime you  
please, fix him on the highest Pinnacle of unbounded  
Power ; and in that State let us enquire into his degree  
of Happiness ; make him at once the Terror and the  
Envy of his Neighbours, send his Ambition out to War,  
and gratify it with extended Fame and Victories ;  
bring him in triumph home, with great unhappy Cap-  
tives behind him, through the Acclamations of his  
People, to repossess his Realms in Peace. Well,  
when the Dust has been brusht from his Purple, what  
will he do next ? Why, this envy'd Monarch (who,  
we will allow to have a more exalted Mind than to  
be delighted with the trifling Flatteries of a congratu-  
lating Circle) will chuse to retire, I presume, to enjoy  
in private the Contemplation of his Glory ; an Amuse-  
ment, you will say, that well becomes his Station !  
But there, in that pleasing Ruminatation, when he has  
made up his new Account of Happiness, how much,  
pray, will be added to the Balance more than as it  
stood before his last Expedition ? From what one Article  
will the Improvement of it appear ? Will it arise from  
the conscious Pride of having done his weaker Enemy  
an Injury ? Are his Eyes so dazzled with false Glory,  
that he thinks it a less Crime in him to break into the  
Palace of his princely Neighbour, because he gave him  
time to defend it, than for a Subject feloniously to plun-  
der the House of a private Man ? Or is the Outrage  
of Hunger and Necessity more enormous than the Ra-  
vage of Ambition ? Let us even suppose the wicked



16 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

Usage of the World, as to that Point, may keep his Conscience quiet; still, what is he to do with the infinite Spoil that his imperial Rapine has brought home? Is he to sit down, and vainly deck himself with the Jewels which he has plunder'd from the Crown of another, whom Self-defence had compell'd to oppose him? No, let us not debase his Glory into so low a Weakness. What Appetite, then, are these shining Treasures feed for? Is their vast Value in seeing his vulgar Subjects stare at them, wise Men smile at them, or his Children play with them? or can the new Extent of his Dominions add a Cubit to his Happiness? Was not his Empire wide enough before to do good in? And can it add to his Delight that now no Monarch has such room to do mischief in? But farther; if even the great *Augustus*, to whose Reign such Praises are given, cou'd not enjoy his Days of Peace, free from the Terrors of repeated Conspiracies, which lost him more Quiet to suppress, than his Ambition cost him to provoke them. What human Eminence is secure? In what private Cabinet then must this wondrous Monarch lock up his Happiness, that common Eyes are never to behold it? Is it, like his Person, a Prisoner to its own Superiority? Or does he at last poorly place it in the Triumph of his injurious Devastations? One Moment's Search into himself will plainly shew him, that real and reasonable Happiness can have no Existence without Innocence and Liberty. What a Mockery is Greatness without them? How lonesome must be the Life of that Monarch, who, while he governs only by being fear'd, is restrain'd from letting down his Grandeur sometimes to forget himself, and to humanize him into the Benevolence and Joy of Society? To throw off his cumbersome Robe of Majesty to be a Man without Disguise, to have a sensible Taste of Life in its Simplicity, till he confess, from the sweet Experience, that *dulce est desipere in loco*, was no Fool's Philosophy. Or if the gawdy Charms of Pre-eminence are so strong that they leave him no Sense of a less pompous, tho' a more rational Enjoyment, none sure can envy him, but those who are the Dupes of an equally fantastick Ambition.

My

My Imagination is quite heated and fatigued, in dressing up this Phantome of Felicity ; but I hope it has not made me so far misunderstood, as not to have allow'd, that in all the Dispensations of Providence, the Exercise of a great and virtuous Mind is the most elevated State of Happiness : No, Sir, I am not for setting up Galety against Wisdom ; nor for preferring the Man of Pleasure to the Philosopher ; but for shewing, that the Wisest, or Greatest Man, is very near an unhappy Man, if the unbending Amusements I am contending for, are not sometimes admitted to relieve him.

How far I may have over-rated these Amusements, let graver Casulists decide : whether they affirm, or reject, what I have asserted, hurts not my Purpose ; which is not to give Laws to others ; but to shew by what Laws I govern myself : If I am misguided, 'tis Nature's Fault, and I follow her, from this Persuasion ; That as Nature has distinguish'd our Species from the mute Creation, by our Reason, her Design must have been, by that Faculty, as evidently to raise our Happiness, as by our *O's Sublime* (our erected Faces) to lift the Dignity of our Form above them.

Notwithstanding all I have said, I am afraid there is an absolute Power, in what is simply call'd our Constitution, that will never admit of other Rules for Happiness, than her own ; from which (be we never so wise or weak) without Divine Assistance, we only can receive it : So that all this my Parade, and Grimace of Philosophy, has been only making a mighty Merit of following my own Inclination. A very natural Vanity ! Though it is some sort of Satisfaction to know he does not impose upon me. Vanity again ! However, think it what you will that has drawn me into this copious Digression, 'tis now high time to drop it : I shall therefore in my next Chapter return to my school, from whence, I fear, I have too long been Truant.



## C H A P. II.

*He that writes of himself, not easily tir'd.  
Boys may give Men Lessons. The Authors  
Preferment at School attended with Mis-  
fortunes. The Danger of Merit among  
Equals. Of Satyrists and Backbiters.  
What effect they have had upon the Author.  
Stanzas publish'd by himself against himself.*

**I**T often makes me smile, to think how contentedly I have sat myself down, to write my own Life; nay, and with less Concern for what may be said of it, than I should feel, were I to do the same for a deceas'd Acquaintance. This you will easily account for, when you consider, that nothing gives a Coxcomb more Delight, than when you suffer him to talk of himself; which sweet Liberty I here enjoy for a whole Volume together! A Privilege, which neither cou'd be allow'd me, nor wou'd become me to take, in the Company I am generally admitted to; but here, where I have all the Talk to myself, and have no body to interrupt or contradict me, sure, to say, whatever I have a mind other People shou'd know of me, is a Pleasure which none but Authors, as vain as myself, can conceive.— But to my History.

However little worth notice the Life of a School-boy may be suppos'd to contain; yet, as the Passions of Men and Children have much the same Motives, and differ very little in their Effects, unless where the elder Experience may be able to conceal them: As therefore what arises from the Boy, may possibly be a Lesson to the Man, I shall venture to relate a Fact, or two, that happen'd while I was still at School.

In February, 1684-5, died King *Charles II.* who being the only King I had ever seen, I remember (young as I was) his death made a strong Impression upon me, as it drew Tears from the Eyes of Multitudes,

tudes, who look'd no further into him than I did : But it was, then, a sort of a School-Doctrine to regard our Monarch as a Deity : as in the former Reign it was to insist he was accountable to this World, as well as to that above him. But what, perhaps, gave King *Charles II.* this peculiar possession of so many Hearts, was his affable and easy manner in conversing ; a Quality that goes farther with the greater Part of Mankind than many higher Virtues, which, in a Prince, might more immediately regard the publick Prosperity. Even his indolent Amusement of playing with his Dogs, and feeding his Ducks, in *St. James Park*, (which I have seen him do) made the common People adore him, and consequently overlook in him, what, in a Prince of a different Temper, they might have been out of humour at.

I cannot help remembring one more Particular in those Times, tho' it be quite foreign to what will follow. I was carry'd by my Father to the Chappel in *Whitehall* ; where I saw the King, and his royal Brother the then Duke of *York*, with him in the Closet, and present during the whole Divine Service. Such Dispensation, it seems, for his Interest, had that unhappy Prince, from his real Religion, to assist at another, to which his Heart was so utterly averse.—I now proceed to the Facts I promis'd to speak of.

King *Charles* his Death was judg'd, by our School-master, a proper Subject to lead the Form I was in, into a higher kind of Exercise ; he therefore enjoin'd us, severally, to make his Funeral Oration : This sort of Task, so entirely New to us all, the Boys receiv'd with Astonishment, as a Work above their Capacity ; and tho' the Master persisted in his Command, they one and all, except my self, resolv'd to decline it. But I, Sir, who was ever giddily forward, and thoughtless of Consequences, set my self roundly to work, and got through it as well as I could. I remember to this Hour, that single Topick of his Affability (which made me mention it before) was the chief Motive that warm'd me into the Undertaking ; and to shew how  
very

20 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

very childish a Notion I had of his Character at that time, I rais'd his Humanity, and Love of those who serv'd him, to such height, that I imputed his Death to the Shock he receiv'd from the Lord *Arlington's* being at the point of Death, about a Week before him. This Oration, such as it was, I produc'd the next Morning : All the other Boys pleaded their Inability, which the Master taking rather as a mark of their Modesty than their Idleness, only seem'd to punish by setting me at the Head of the Form : Preferment dearly bought ! Much happier had I been to have sunk my Performance in the general Modesty of declining it. A most uncomfortable Life I led among 'em, for many a Day after ! I was so jeer'd, laugh'd at, and hated as a pragmatikal Bastard (*School-boys Language*) who had betray'd the whole Form, that scarce any of 'em would keep me company ; and tho' it so far advanc'd me into the Master's Favour, that he wou'd often take me from the School, to give me an Airing with him on Horse-back, while they were left to their Lessons ; you may be sure, such envy'd Happiness did not encrease their Good-will to me : Notwithstanding which, my Stupidity cou'd take no warning from their Treatment. An Accident of the same nature happen'd soon after, that might have frighten'd a Boy of a meek Spirit, from attempting any thing above the lowest Capacity. On the 23d of *April* following, being the Coronation-Day of the new King, the School petition'd the Master for leave to play ; to which he agreed, provided any of the Boys wou'd produce an *English Ode* upon that Occasion.—The very Word, *Ode*, I know, makes you smile already : and so it does me ; not only because it still makes so many poor Devils turn Wits upon it, but from a more agreeable Motive ; from a Reflection of how little I then thought that, half a Century afterwards, I shou'd be call'd upon twice a Year, by my Post, to make the same kind of Oblations to an *unexceptionable* Prince, the serene Happiness of whose Reign my halting Rhimes are still so unequal to.—This, I own, is Vanity without Disguise ; but,

*Has*

*Hæc olim meminisse juvat* : The remembrance of the miserable Prospect we had then before us, and have since escap'd by a Revolution, is now a Pleasure, which, without that Remembrance, I could not so heartily have enjoy'd. The Ode I was speaking of fell to my Lot, which, in about half an Hour I produc'd. I cannot say it was much above the merry Style of *Sing! Sing the Day, and sing the Song*, in the Farce : Yet, bad as it was, it serv'd to get the School a Play-day, and to make me not a little vain upon it ; which last Effect so disgusted my Play-fellows, that they left me out of the Party I had most Mind to be of, in that Day's Recreation. But their Ingratitude serv'd only to increase my Vanity ; for I consider'd them as so many beaten Tits, that had just had the Mortification of seeing my Hack of a *Pegasus* come in before them. This low Passion is so rooted in our Nature, that sometimes riper Heads cannot govern it. I have met with much the same silly sort of Coldness, even from my Cotemporaries of the Theatre, from having the superfluous Capacity of writing my self the Characters I have acted.

Here, perhaps, I may again seem to be vain ; but if all these Facts are true (as true they are) how can I help it ? Why am I oblig'd to conceal them ? The Merit of the best of them is not so extraordinary as to have warn'd me to be nice upon it ; and the Praise due to them is so small a Fish, it was scarce worth while to throw my Line into the Water for it. If I confess my Vanity while a Boy, can it be Vanity, when a Man, to remember it ? And if I have a tolerable Feature, will not that as much belong to my Picture, as an Imperfection ? In a Word, from what I have mentioned, I wou'd observe only this ; That when we are conscious of the least comparative Merit in ourselves, we should take as much care to conceal the Value we set upon it, as if it were a real Defect : To be elated, or vain upon it, is shewing your Money before People in want ; ten to one, but some who may think you have too much, may borrow, or pick your Pocket before you get home. He who  
assumes

assumes Praise to himself, the World will think overpays himself. Even the Suspicion of being vain, ought as much to be dreaded as the Guilt itself. *Cæsar* was of the same Opinion, in regard to his Wife's Chastity. Praise, tho' it may be our due, is not like a *Bank Bill*, to be paid upon Demand; to be valuable, it must be voluntary. When we are dun'd for it, we have a Right and Privilege to refuse it. If Compulsion insists upon it, it can only be paid as Persecution in Points of Faith is, in a counterfeit Coin: And who, ever, believ'd Occasional Conformity to be sincere? *Nero*, the most vain Coxcomb of a Tyrant that ever breath'd, cou'd not raise an unfeigned Applause to his Harp by military Execution: Even where praise is deserv'd, Ill-nature and Self-conceit (Passions, that poll a majority of Mankind) will with less reluctance part with their Money, than their Approbation. Men of the greatest Merit are forc'd to stay 'till they die, before the World will fairly make up their Account: Then, indeed, you have a Chance for your full Due, because it is less grudg'd when you are incapable of enjoying it: Then, perhaps, even Malice shall heap Praises upon your Memory; tho' not for your sake, but that your surviving Competitors may suffer by a Comparison. 'Tis from the same Principle that *Satyr* shall have a thousand Readers, where *Panegyric* has one. When I therefore find my Name at length, in the Satyrical Works of our most celebrated living Author, I never look upon those Lines as Malice meant to me, (for he knows I never provok'd it) but Profit to himself: One of his Points must be, to have many Readers: He considers that my Face and Name are more known than those of many thousands of more consequence in the Kingdom: That therefore, right or wrong, a Lick at the *Laureat* will always be a sure bait, *ad capiendum vulgus*, to catch him little Readers: And that to gratify the Unlearned, by now and then interspersing those merry Sacrifices of an old Acquaintance to their Taste, is a piece of quite right Poetical Craft.

But



But as a little bad Poetry, is the greatest Crime he lays to my charge, I am willing to subscribe to his Opinion of it. That this sort of Wit is one of the easiest ways too, of pleasing the generality of Readers, is evident from the comfortable Subsistence which our weekly Retailers of Politicks have been known to pick up, merely by making bold with a Government that had unfortunately neglected to find their Genius a better Employment.

Hence too arises all that flat Poverty of Censure and Invektive, that so often has a Run in our publick Papers, upon the Success of a new Author; when, God knows, there is seldom above one Writer among hundreds in being at the same time, whose Satyr a Man of common Sense ought to be mov'd at. When a Master in the Art is angry, then, indeed, we ought to be alarm'd! How terrible a Weapon is Satyr in the Hand of a great Genius? Yet even there, how liable is Prejudice to misuse it? How far, when general, it may reform our Morals, or what Cruelties it may inflict by being angrily particular, is perhaps above my reach to determine. I shall therefore only beg leave to interpose what I feel for others, whom it may personally have fallen upon. When I read those Mortifying Lines of our most eminent Author, in his Character of *Atticus* (*Atticus*, whose Genius in Verse, and whose Morality in Prose, has been so justly admir'd) though I am charm'd with the Poetry, my Imagination is hurt at the Severity of it; and tho' I allow the Satyrist to have had personal Provocation, yet, methinks, for that very Reason, he ought not to have troubled the Publick with it: For as it is observ'd in the 242d *Tattler*, "In all Terms of Reproof, where the Sentence appears to arise from Personal Hatred, or Passion, it is not then made the Cause of Mankind, but a Misunderstanding between two Persons." But if such kind of Satyr has its Incontestable Greatness; if its exemplary Brightness may not mislead inferior Wits into a barbarous Imitation of its Severity, then I have only admir'd the Verses, and expos'd myself, by bringing them under so scrupulous a Reflection:



Reflection: But the Pain which the Acrimony of those Verses gave me, is, in some measure, allay'd, in finding that this inimitable Writer, as he advances in Years, has since had Candour enough to celebrate the same Person for his visible Merit. Happy Genius! whose Verse, like the Eye of Beauty, can heal the deepest Wounds with the least Glance of Favour.

Since I am got so far into this Subject, you must give me leave to go thro' all I have a mind to say upon it; because I am not sure, that in a more proper Place, my Memory may be so full of it. I cannot find, therefore, from what Reason, Stayr is allow'd more Licence than Comedy, or why either of them (to be admir'd) ought not to be limited by Decency and Justice. Let *Juvenal* and *Aristophanes* have taken what Liberties they please if the Learned have nothing more than their Antiquity to justify their laying about them, at that enormous rate, I shall wish they had a better Excuse for them! The Personal Ridicule and Scurrility thrown upon *Socrates*, which *Plutarch* too condemns; and the Boldness of *Juvenal*, in writing real Names over guilty Characters, I cannot think are to be pleaded in right of our modern Liberties of the same kind. *Facit indignatio versum*, may be a very spirited Expression, and seems to give a Reader hopes of a lively Entertainment: But I am afraid Reproof is in unequal Hands, when Anger is its Executioner; and tho' an outrageous Invektive may carry some Truth in it, yet it will never have that natural, easy Credit with us, which we gave to the laughing Ironies of a cool Head. 'The Satyr that can smile *circum præcordia ludit*, and seldom fails to bring the Reader quite over to his Side, whenever Ridicule and Folly are at variance. But when a Person satyriz'd is us'd with the extremest Rigour, he may sometimes meet with Compassion, instead of Contempt, and throw back the Odium that was design'd for him, upon the Author. When I would therefore disarm the Satyrist of this Indignation, I mean little more, than that I wou'd take from him all private or personal Predjudice, and wou'd still leave

Leave him as much general Vice to scourge as he pleases; and that with as much Fire and Spirit as Art and Nature demand to enliven his Work, and keep his Reader awake.

Against all this it may be objected, That these are Laws which none but phlegmatick Writers will observe, and only Men of Eminence should give. I grant it, and therefore only submit them to Writers of better Judgment. I pretend not to restrain others from chusing what I don't like; they are welcome (if they please too) to think I offer these Rules, more from an Incapacity to break them, than from a moral Humanity. Let it be so! Still, That will not weaken the strength of what I have asserted, if my Assertion be true. And though I allow, that Provocation is not apt to weigh out its Resentments by Drachms and Scruples, I shall still think, that no publick Revenge can be honourable, where it is not limited by Justice; and if Honour is insatiable in its Revenge, it loses what it contends for, and sinks itself, if not into Cruelty, at least into Vain-glory.

This so singular Concern which I have shewn for others, may naturally lead you to ask me, what I feel for myself, when I am unfavourably treated by the elaborate Authors of our daily Papers. Shall I be sincere, and own my Frailty? Its usual Effect is to make me vain! For I consider, if I were quite good for nothing, these Pidlars in Wit would not be concern'd to take me to pieces, or (not to be quite so vain) when they moderately charge me with only Ignorance, or Dulness, I see nothing in That which an honest Man need be asham'd of: There is many a good Soul, who, from those sweet Slumbers of the Brain, are never awaken'd by the least harmful Thought; and I am sometimes attempted to think those Retailers of Wit may be of the same Class; that what they write proceeds not from Malice, but Industry; and that I ought no more to reproach them, than I would a Lawyer that pleads against me for his Fee; that their Detraction, like Dung, thrown upon a Meadow, tho' it may seem at first to deform the Prospect, in a little time

it will disappear of itself, and leave an involuntary Crop of Praise behind it.

When they confine themselves to a sober Criticism upon what I write ; if their Censure is just, what Answer can I make to it ? If it is unjust, why should I suppose that a sensible Reader will not see it, as well as myself ? Or, admit I were able to expose them, by a laughing Reply, will not that Reply beget a Rejoinder ? And though they might be Gainers, by having the worst on't, in a Paper War, that is no Temptation for me to come into it. Or (to make both sides less considerable) would not my bearing Ill-language, from a Chimney-sweeper, do me less harm, than it would be to box with him, tho' I were sure to beat him ? Nor indeed is the little Reputation I have, as an Author, worth the trouble of a Defence. Then, as no Criticism can possibly make me worse than I really am ; so nothing I say of my self can possibly make me better : When therefore a determin'd Critick comes arm'd with Wit and Outrage, to take from me that small Pittance I have, I would no more dispute with him, than I wou'd resist a Gentleman of the Road, to save a little Pocket-money. Men that are in want themselves, seldom make a Conscience of taking it it from others. Whoever thinks I have too much, is welcome to what share of it he pleases : Nay, to make him more merciful (as I partly guess the worst he can say of what I now write) I will prevent even the Imputation of his doing me Injustice, and honestly say it myself, *viz.* That of all the Assurances I was ever guilty of, this, of writing my own Life, is the most hardy. I beg his Pardon ! — Impudent is what I shou'd have said ! That thro' every Page there runs a Vein of Vanity and Impertinence, which no *French Ensigns memoirs* ever came up to ; but, as this is a common Error, I presume the Terms of *Doating Trifler*, *Old Fool*, or *Conceited Coxcomb*, will carry Contempt enough for an impartial Censor to bestow on me ; that my Style is unequal, pert, and frothy, patch'd and party-colour'd, like the Coat of an *Harlequin* ; low and pompous, cramm'd with Epithets, strew'd

strew'd with Scraps of second-hand *Latin* from common Quotations ; frequently aiming at Wit, without ever hitting the Mark ; a mere Ragoust, toss'd up from the Offals of other Authors : My Subject below all Pens but my own, which, whenever I keep to, is flatly dawb'd by one eternal Egotism : That I want nothing but Wit, to be as an accomplish'd a Coxcomb here, as ever I attempted to expose on the Theatre : Nay, that this very Confession is no more a sign of my Modesty, than it is a Proof of my Judgment ; that, in short, you may roundly tell me, that—*Cinna* (or *Cibber*) *vult videri Pauper, et est Pauper*.

*When humble Cinna cries, I'm Poor and Low,  
You may believe him—he is really so.*

Well, Sir Critick ! and what of all this ? Now I have laid myself at your Feet, what will you do with me ? Expose me ? Why, dear Sir, does not every Man that writes, expose himself ? Can you make me more ridiculous than Nature has made me ? You could not sure suppose, that I would lose the Pleasure of Writing, because you might possibly judge me a Blockhead, or perhaps might pleasantly tell other People they ought to think me so too. Will not they judge as well from what *I* say, as from what *You* say ? If then you attack me merely to divert yourself, your Excuse for writing will be no better than mine. But perhaps you may want Bread : If that be the Case, even go to Dinner, i' God's Name !

If our best Authors when teiz'd by these Trisslers, have not been Masters of this Indifference, I shou'd not wonder if it were believ'd in me ; but when it is consider'd that I have allow'd, my never having been disturb'd into a Reply, has proceeded as much from Vanity as from Philosophy, the Matter then may not seem so incredible : And though I confess, the complete Revenge of making them Immortal Dunces in Immortal Verse, might be glorious ; yet, if you will call it Insensibility in me, never to have winc'd at them, even that Insensibility has its Happiness, and

what could Glory give me more? For my part, I have always had the Comfort to think, whenever they design'd me a Disfavour, it generally flew back into their own Faces, as it happens to Children when they squirt at their Play-fellows against the Wind. If a Scribbler cannot be easy, because he fancies I have too good an Opinion of my own Productions, let him write on, and mortify; I owe him not the Charity to be out of temper myself, merely to keep him quiet, or give him Joy: Nor, in reality, can I see, why any thing misrepresented, tho' believ'd of me by Persons to whom I am unknown, ought to give me any more Concern, than what may be thought of me in *Lapland*: 'Tis with those with whom I am to *live* only, where my Character can affect me; and I will venture to say, he must find out a new way of Writing that will make me pass my Time *there* less agreeably.

You see, Sir, how hard it is for a Man that is talking of himself, to know when to give over; but if you are tired, lay me aside till you have a fresh Appetite; if not, I'll tell you a Story.

In the Year 1730, there were many Authors, whose Merit wanted nothing but Interest to recommend them to the vacant *Laurel*, and who took it ill, to see it at last conferr'd upon a Comedian; insomuch, that they were resolv'd, at least, to shew Specimens of their superior Pretensions, and accordingly enliven'd the publick Papers with ingenious Epigrams, and satirical Flirts, at the unworthy Successor: These Papers, my Friends, with a wicked Smile, would often put into my Hands, and desire me to read them fairly in Company: This was a Challenge which I never declin'd, and, to do my doughty Antagonists justice, I always read them with as much impartial Spirit, as if I had writ them myself. While I was thus beset on all sides, there happen'd to step forth a poetical Knight-Errant to my Assistance, who was hardy enough to publish some compassionate Stanzas in my Favour. These, you may be sure, the Raillery of Friends could do no less than say, I had written to myself.



*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 29

myself. To deny it, I knew would but have confirm'd their pretended Suspicion: I therefore told them, since it gave them such Joy to believe them my own, I would do my best to make the whole Town think so too. As the Oddness of this Reply was, I knew, what would not be easily comprehended, I desired them to have a Day's Patience, and I would print an Explanation to it: To conclude, in two Days after I sent this Letter, with some doggerel Rhimes at the bottom,

*To the Author of the Whitehall Evening-Post.*

S I R,

**T**HE Verses to the Laureat, in yours of Saturday last, have occasion'd the following Reply, which I hope you'll give a place in your next, to shew that we can be quick, as well as smart, upon a proper Occasion: And, as I think it the lowest Mark of a Scoundrel to make bold with any Man's Character in Print, without subscribing the true Name of the Author: I therefore desire, if the Laureat is concern'd enough, to ask the Question, that you will tell him my Name, and where I live: till then, I beg leave to be known by no other than that of,

Your Servant,

Monday, Jan. 11, 1730.

FRANCIS FAIRPLAY.

These were the Verses.

I.

*Ab, bah! Sir Coll, is that thy Way,  
Thy own dull Praise to write?  
And wou'd'st thou stand so sure a Lay?  
No, that's too stale a Eite.*

D 3

*Nature,*



II.

*Nature, and Art, in thee combine,  
Thy Talents here excel :  
All shining Brass thou dost outshine,  
To play the Cheat so well.*

III.

*Who sees thee in Iago's Part,  
But thinks thee such a Rogue ?  
And is not glad with all his Heart,  
To hang so sad a Dog ?*

IV.

*When Bays thou play'st, Thyself thou art ;  
For that by Nature fit,  
No Blockhead better suits the Part,  
Than such a Coxcomb Wit.*

V.

*In Wronghead too, thy Brains we see,  
Who might do well at Plough ;  
As fit for Parliament was he,  
As for the Laurel, Thou.*

VI.

*Bring thy protected Verge from Court,  
And try it on the Stage ;  
There it will make much better Sport,  
And set the Town in Rage.*

VII.

*There Beaux, and Wits, and Cits, and Smarts,  
Where Hissin's not unctwil,  
Will sew their Parts, to thy Deserts,  
And send it to the Devil.*

*But,*

VIII.

*But, ah ! in vain, 'gainst Thee we write,  
In vain thy Verse we maul !  
Our sharpest Satyr's thy Delight,  
• For ——— Blood ! thou'lt stand it all.*

IX.

*Thunder, 'tis said, the Laurel spares ;  
Nought but thy Brows could blast it :  
And yet ——— O curst, provoking Stars !  
Thy Comfort is, thou hast it.*

This, Sir, I offer as a Proof, that I was seven Years ago the same cold Candidate for Fame, which I would still be thought ; you will not easily suppose I could have much Concern about it, while, to gratify the merry Pique of my Friends, I was capable of seeming to head the Poetical Cry then against me, and at the same time of never letting the Publick know, 'till this Hour, that these Verses were written by myself : Nor do I give them you as an Entertainment, but merely to shew you this particular Cast of my Temper.

When I have said this, I would not have it thought Affectation in me, when I grant, that no Man worthy the Name of an Author, is a more faulty Writer than myself ; that I am not Master of my own Language, I too often feel, when I am at a Loss for expression : I know too that I have too bold a Disregard for that Correctness, which others set so just a Value upon : This I ought to be asham'd of, when I find that Persons, of perhaps colder Imaginations, are allow'd to write better than myself. Whenever I speak of any thing that highly delights me, I find it very difficult to keep my Words within the Bounds of Common Sense : Even when I write too, the same Failing will sometimes get the better of me ; of which I cannot give you a stronger Instance, than in that wild Expression I made

• A Line in the Epilogue to the Nonjuror.

made use of in the first Edition of my Preface to the *Provok'd Husband*; where, speaking of Mrs. *Oldfield's* excellent Performance in the Part of Lady *Townly*, my Words ran thus, *viz. It is not enough to say, that here she outdid her usual Outdoing.*—A most vile Jingle, I grant it! You may well ask me, How could I possibly commit such a Wantonness to Paper? And I owe myself the Shame of confessing, I have no Excuse for it. but that, like a Lover in the Fulness of his Content, by endeavouring to be floridly grateful, I talk'd Nonsense. Not but it makes me smile to remember how many flat Writers have made themselves brisk upon this single Expression; wherever the Verb, *Outdo*, could come in, the pleasant Accusative, *Outdoing*, was sure to follow it. The provident Wags knew, that *Decies repetita placet*: so delicious a Morfel could not be serv'd up too often! After it had held them nine times told for a Jest, the Publick has been pester'd with a tenth Skull, thick enough to repeat it. Nay, the very learned in the Law, have at last facetiously laid hold of it! Ten Years after it first came from me, it serv'd to enliven the Eloquence of an eminent Pleader before a House of Parliament! What Author would not envy me so frolicksome a Fault, that had such publick Honours paid to it?

After this Consciousness of my real Defects, you will easily judge, Sir, how little I presume that my Poetical Labours may outlive those of my mortal Contemporaries.

At the same time that I am so humble in my Pretensions to Fame, I would not be thought to undervalue it; Nature will not suffer us to despise it, but she may sometimes make us too fond of it. I have known more than one good Writer, very near ridiculous, from being in too much Heat about it. Whoever intrinsically deserves it, will always have a proportionable Right to it. It can neither be resign'd, nor taken from you by Violence. Truth, which is unalterable, must (however his Fame may be contested) give every Man his Due: What a Poem weighs, it will be worth; nor

nor is it in the Power of Human Eloquence, with Favour or Prejudice, to increase or diminish its Value. Prejudice, 'tis true, may a while discolour it; but it will always have its Appeal to the Equity of good Sense, which will never fail, in the end, to reverse all false Judgment against it. Therefore when I see an eminent Author hurt, and impatient at an impotent Attack upon his Labours, he disturbs my Inclination to admire him; I grow doubtful of the favourable Judgment I have made of him, and am quite uneasy to see him so tender, in a Point he cannot but know he ought not himself to be judge of; his Concern indeed, at another's Prejudice, or Disapprobation, may be natural; but, to own it, seems to me a natural Weakness. When a Work is apparently great, it will go without Crutches; all your Art and Anxiety to heighten the Fame of it, then becomes low and little. He that will bear no Censure, must be often robb'd of his due praise. Fools have as good a Right to be Readers, as Men of Sense have, and why not to give their Judgments too? Methinks it would be a sort of Tyranny in Wit, for an Author to be publickly putting every Argument to death that appear'd against him; so absolute a Demand for Approbation, puts us upon our Right to dispute it; Praise is as much the Reader's Property, as Wit is the Author's; Applause is not a Tax paid to him as a Prince, but rather a Benevolence given to him as a Beggar; and we have naturally more Charity for the dumb Beggar, than the sturdy one. The Merit of a Writer, and a fine Woman's Face, are never mended by their talking of them: How amiable is she that seems not to know she is handsome.

To conclude; all I have said upon this Subject is much better contained in six Lines of a Reverend Author, which will be an Answer to all critical Censure for ever.

*Time is the Judge; Time has nor Friend, nor Foe;  
False Fame will wither, and the True will grow:*

*Arm'd*

### 34 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

*Arm'd with this Truth, all Criticks I defy,  
For, if I fall, by my own Pen I die.  
While Snarlers strive with proud, but fruitless Pain,  
To wound Immortals, or to slay the Slain.*

## C H A P. III.

*The Author's several Chances for the Church, the Court, and the Army. Going to the University. Met the Revolution at Nottingham. Took Arms on that Side. What he saw of it. A few Political Thoughts. Fortune willing to do for him. His neglect of her. The Stage preferr'd to all her Favours. The Profession of an Actor consider'd. The Misfortunes and Advantages of it.*

I Am now come to that Crisis of my Life, when Fortune seem'd to be at a Loss what she should do with me. Had she favour'd my Father's first Designation of me, he might then, perhaps, have had as sanguine hopes of my being a Bishop, as I afterwards conceiv'd of my being a General when I first took Arms, at the Revolution. Nay, after that, I had a third Chance too, equally as good, of becoming an Under-proper of the State. How, at last, I came to be none of all these, the Sequel will inform you.

About the Year 1687, I was taken from School to stand at the Election of Children into *Winchester College*; my being, by my Mother's side, a Descendant of *William of Wickam*, the Founder, my Father (who knew little how the World was to be dealt with) imagined my having that Advantage, would be Security enough for my Success, and so sent me simply down thither, without the least favourable Recommendation or Interest, but that of my naked Merit, and a pom-

pous

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c. 35*

ous Pedigree in my Pocket. Had he tack'd a Direction to my Back, and sent me by the Carrier to the Mayor of the Town, to be chosen Member of Parliament there, I might have had just as much chance to have succeeded in the one, as the other. But I must not omit in this place, to let you know, that the Experience which my Father then bought, at my Cost, taught him, some Years after, to take a more judicious care of my younger Brother, *Lewis Cibber*, whom, with the Present of a Statue of the Founder, of his own making, he recommended to the same College. This Statue now stands (I think) over the School Door there, and was so well executed, that it seem'd to speak ——— for its Kinsman. It was no sooner set up, than the Door of Preferment was open'd to him.

Here, one wou'd think, my Brother had the Advantage of me, in the Favour of Fortune, by this his first laudable Step into the World. I own, I was so proud of his Success, that I even valued myself upon it; and yet it is but a melancholy Reflexion to observe, how unequally his Profession and mine were provided for; when I, who had been the Outcast of Fortune, could find means, from my Income of the Theatre, before I was my own Master there, to supply, in his highest Preferment, his common Necessities. I cannot part with his Memory without telling you, I had as sincere a Concern for this Brother's Well-being, as my own. He had lively Parts, and more than ordinary Learning, with a good deal of natural Wit and Humour; but from too great a Disregard to his Health, he died a Fellow of *New College* in *Oxford*, soon after he had been ordain'd by *Dr. Compton*, then Bishop of *London*. I now return to the State of my own Affair at *Winchester*.

After the Election, the moment I was inform'd that I was one of the unsuccessful Candidates, I blest my self to think what a happy Reprieve I had got, from the confin'd Life of a School-boy! and the same Day took Post back to *London*, that I might arrive time enough to see a Play (then my darling Delight) before my



my Mother might demand an Account of my travelling Charges. When I look back to that time, it almost makes me tremble to think what Miseries, in fifty Years farther in Life, such an unthinking Head was liable to ! To ask, why Providence afterwards took more care of me, than I did of myself, might be making too bold an Enquiry into its secret Will and Pleasure : All I can say to that Point, is, that I am thankful, and amaz'd at it !

'Twas about this time I first imbib'd an Inclination, which I durst not reveal, for the Stage ; for, besides that I knew it would disoblige my Father, I had no Conception of any means, practicable, to make my way to it. I therefore suppress'd the bewitching Ideas of so sublime a Station, and compounded with my Ambition by laying a lower Scheme, of only getting the nearest way into the immediate Life of a Gentleman-Collegiate. My Father being at this time employ'd at *Chatsworth* in *Derbyshire*, by the (then) Earl of *Devonshire*, who was raising that Seat from a *Gothick*, to a *Grecian*, Magnificence, I made use of the Leisure I then had, in *London*, to open to him, by Letter, my Disinclination to wait another Year for an uncertain Preferment at *Winchester*, and to entreat him that he would send me, *per saltum*, by a shorter Cut, to the University. My Father, who was naturally indulgent to me, seem'd to comply with my Request, and wrote word, that as soon as his Affairs would permit, he would carry me with him, and settle me in some College, but rather at *Cambridge*, where, (during his late Residence at that Place, in making some Statues that now stand upon *Trinity College* New Library, he had contracted some Acquaintance with the Heads of Houses, who might assist his Intentions for me. This I lik'd better than to go discountenanc'd to *Oxford*, to which it would have been a sort of Reproach to me, not to have come elected. After some Months were elaps'd, my Father, not being willing to let me lie too long idling in *London*, sent for me down to *Chatsworth*, to be under his Eye, till he cou'd be

at leisure to carry me to *Cambridge*. Before I could set out, on my Journey thither, the Nation fell in labour of the Revolution, the News being then just brought to *London*, That the Prince of *Orange*, at the Head of an Army was landed in the *West*. When I came to *Nottingham*, I found my Father in Arms there, among those Forces which the Earl of *Devonshire* had rais'd for the Redress of our violated Laws and Liberties. My Father judg'd this a proper Season, for a young Strippling to turn himself loose into the Bustle of the World; and being himself too advanc'd in Years, to endure the Winter Fatigue, which might possibly follow, entreated that noble Lord, that he would be pleas'd to accept of his Son in his room, and that he would give him (my Father) leave to return, and finish his Works at *Chattsworth*. This was so well receiv'd by his Lordship, that he not only admitted of my Service, but promis'd my Father, in return, that when Affairs were settled, he would provide for me. Upon this, my Father return'd to *Derbyshire*, while I, not a little transported, jump'd into his Saddle. Thus, in one Day, all my Thoughts of the University were smother'd in Ambition! A slight Commission for a Horse-Officer, was the least View I had before me. At this Crisis you cannot but observe, that the Fate of King *James*, and of the Prince of *Orange*, and that of so minute a Being as my self, were all at once upon the Anvil: In what shape they would severally come out, tho' a good *Guest* might be made, was not then *demonstrable* to the deepest Foresight; but as my Fortune seem'd to be of small Importance to the Publick, Providence thought fit to postpone it, 'till that of those great Rulers of Nations, was justly perfected. Yet, had my Father's Business permitted him to have carried me, one Month sooner (as he intended) to the University, who knows but, by this time, that purer Fountain might have wash'd my Imperfections into a Capacity of writing (instead of Plays and Annual Odes) Sermons, and Pastoral Letters. But whatever Care of the Church might, so, have fallen to my share, as I dare say it may be now, in

E

better

38 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

better Hands, I ought not to repine at my being otherwise dispos'd of.

You must, now, consider me as one among those desperate Thousands, who, after a Patience sorely try'd, took Arms under the Banner of Necessity, the natural Parent of all Human Laws, and Government. I question, if in all the Histories of Empire, there is one Instance of so bloodless a Revolution, as that in *England* in 1688, wherein Whigs, Tories, Princes, Prelates, Nobles, Clergy, common People, and a standing Army, were unanimous. To have seen all *England* of one Mind, is to have liv'd at a very particular Juncture. Happy Nation! who are never divided among themselves, but when they have least to complain of! Our greatest Grievance since that time, seems to have been, that we cannot all govern; and 'till the Number of good Places are equal to those, who think themselves qualified for them, there must ever be a Cause of Contention among us. While Great Men want great Posts, the Nation will never want real or seeming Patriots; and while great Posts are fill'd with Persons, whose Capacities are but Human, such Persons will never be allow'd to be without Errors; not even the Revolution, with all its Advantages, it seems, has been able to furnish us with unexceptionable Statesmen! for, from that time, I don't remember any one Set of Ministers, that have not been heartily rail'd at; a Period long enough, one would think, (if all of them have been as bad as they have been call'd) to make a People despair of ever seeing a good one: But as it is possible that Envy, Prejudice, or Party, may sometimes have a share in what is generally thrown upon 'em, it is not easy for a private Man, to know who is absolutely in the right, from what is said against them, or from what their Friends or Dependants may say in their Favour: Tho' I can hardly forbear thinking, that they who have been *longest* rail'd at, must, from that Circumstance, shew, in some sort, a Proof of Capacity.---But to my History.

It

It were almost incredible to tell you, at the latter end of King *James's* Time (though the Rod of Arbitrary Power was always shaking over us) with what Freedom and Contempt the common People, in the open Streets, talk'd of his wild Measures to make a whole Protestant Nation Papists; and yet, in the height of our secure and wanton Defiance of him, we, of the Vulgar, had no farther Notion of any Remedy for this Evil, than a satisfy'd Presumption, that our Numbers were too great to be master'd by his mere Will and Pleasure; that though he might be too hard for our Laws, he would never be able to get the better of our Nature; and, that to drive all *England* into Popery and Slavery, he would find, would be teaching an old Lion to dance.

But, happy was it for the Nation, that it had then wiser Heads in it, who knew how to lead a People so dispos'd into Measures for the Publick Preservation.

Here, I cannot help reflecting on the very different Deliverances *England* met with, at this Time, and in the very same Year of the Century before: Then (in 1588) under a glorious Princess, who had, at heart, the Good and Happiness of her People, we scatter'd and destroy'd the most formidable Navy of Invaders, that ever cover'd the Seas: And now (in 1688) under a Prince, who had alienated the Hearts of his People, by his absolute Measures, to oppress them, a foreign Power is receiv'd with open Arms, in defence of our Laws, Liberties, and Religion, which our native Prince had invaded! How widely different were these two Monarchs in their Sentiments of Glory! But *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.*

When we consider, in what height of the Nation's Prosperity, the Successor of Queen *Elizabeth* came to his Throne, it seems amazing, that such a Pile of *English* Fame, and Glory, which her skilful Administration had erected, should, in every following Reign, down to the Revolution, so unhappily moulder away, in one continual Gradation of Political Errors: All which must have been avoided, if the plain Rule,

which that wise Princess left behind her, had been observed, *viz. That the Love of her People was the surest Support of her Throne.* This was the Principle by which she so happily govern'd herself, and those she had the Care of. In this she found Strength to combat, and struggle through more Difficulties, and dangerous Conspiracies, than ever *English* Monarch had to cope with. At the same time that she profess'd to *desire* the People's Love, she took care that her Actions should *deserve* it, without the least Abatement of her Prerogative; the Terror of which she so artfully covered, that she sometimes seem'd to flatter those she was determin'd should obey. If the four following Princes had exercis'd their Regal Authority with so visible a Regard to the Publick Welfare, it were hard to know, whether the People of *England* might have ever complain'd of them, or even felt the want of that Liberty they now so happily enjoy. 'Tis true, that before her Time, our Ancestors had many successful Contests with their Sovereigns for their *ancient Right and Claim* to it; yet what did those Successes amount to? little more than a Declaration, that there was such a Right in being; but who ever saw it enjoy'd? Did not the Actions of almost every succeeding Reign shew, there were still so many Doors of Oppression left open to the Prerogative, that (whatever Value our most eloquent Legislators may have set upon those ancient Liberties) I doubt it will be difficult to fix the Period of their having a real Being, before the Revolution: Or if there ever was an elder Period of our unmolested enjoying them, I own, my poor Judgment is at a Loss where to place it. I will boldly say then, it is, to the Revolution only, we owe the full Possession of what 'till then, we never had more than a perpetually contested Right to: And, from thence, from the Revolution it is, that the Protestant Successors of King *William* have found their Paternal Care and Maintenance of that Right, has been the surest Basis of their Glory.

*These,*



*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 41

These, Sir, are a few of my political Notions, which I have ventur'd to expose, that you may see what sort of an *English* Subject I am; how wise, or weak they may have shown me, is not my Concern; let the weight of these Matters have drawn me never so far out of my Depth, I still flatter my self, that I have kept a simple, honest Head above Water. And it is a solid Comfort to me, to consider that how insignificant soever my Life was at the Revolution, it had still the good Fortune to make one, among the many, who brought it about; and that I, now, with my Coevals, as well as with the Millions, since born, enjoy the happy Effects of it.

But I must now let you see how my particular Fortune went forward, with this Change in the Government; of which I shall not pretend to give you any farther Account than what my simple Eyes saw of it.

We had not been many Days at *Nottingham* before we heard, that the Prince of *Denmark*, with some other great Persons, were gone off, from the King, to the Prince of *Orange*, and that the Princess *Anne*, fearing the King her Father's Re-entment might fall upon her, for her Consort's Revolt, had withdrawn herself, in the Night, from *London*, and was then within half a Day's Journey of *Nottingham*; on which very Morning we were suddenly alarm'd with the News, that two thousand of the Kings Dragoons were in close pursuit to bring her back Prisoner to *London*: But this alarm it seems was all Stratagem, and was but a part of that general Terror which was thrown into many other Places about the Kingdom, at the same time, with design to animate and unite the People in their common Defence; it being then given out, that the *Irish* were every where at our Heels, to cut off all the Protestants within the Reach of their Fury. In this Alarm our Troops scrambled to Arms in as much Order as their Consternation would admit of, when having advanc'd some few Miles on the *London* Road, they met the Princess in a Coach, attended only by the Lady *Churchill* (now *Duchess Dowager of Marlborough*.)



## 42 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

and the Lady *Fitzharding*, whom they conducted into *Nottingham*, through the Acclamations of the People: The same Night all the Noblemen, and the other Persons of Distinction, then in Arms, had the Honour to sup at her Royal Highness's Table; which was then furnish'd (as all her necessary Accommodations were) by the Care, and at the Charge of the Lord *Devonshire*. At this Entertainment, of which I was a Spectator, something very particular surpris'd me: The noble Guests at the Table happening to be more in number, than Attendants out of Liveries, could be found, for I being well known in the Lord *Devonshire's* Family, was desir'd by his Lordship's *Maitre d'Hotel* to assist at it: The Post assign'd me was to observe what the Lady *Churchill* might call for. Being so near the Table, you may naturally ask me, what I might have heard to have pass'd in conversation at it? which I should certainly tell you, had I attended to above two Words that were utter'd there, and those were, *Some Wine and Water*. These, I remember, came distinguish'd, and observ'd to my Ear, because they came from the fair Guest, whom I took such pleasure to wait on: Except at that single Sound, all my Senses were Collect'd into my Eyes, which during the whole Entertainment wanted no better Amusement, than of stealing now and then the delight of gazing on the fair Object so near me: If so clear an Emanation of Beauty, such a commanding Grace of Aspect struck me into a Regard that had something softer than the most profound Respect in it, I cannot see why I may not, without offence, remember it; since Beauty, like the Sun, must sometimes lose its Power to chuse, and shine into equal Warmth, the Peasant and the Courtier. Now to give you, Sir, a farther Proof of how good a Taste my first hopeful entrance into Manhood set out with, I remember above twenty Years after, when the same Lady had given the World four of the loveliest Daughters, that ever were gaz'd on, even after they were all nobly married, and were become the reigning Toasts of every Party of Pleasure, their still lovely Mother had at  
the

the same time her Votaries, and her Health very often took the Lead, in these involuntary Triumphs of Beauty. However presumptuous, or impertinent these Thoughts might have appear'd at my first entertaining them, why may I not hope that my having kept them decently secret, for full fifty Years, may be now a good round Plea for their Pardon? Were I now qualify'd to say more of this celebrated Lady, I should conclude it thus: That she has liv'd (to all Appearance) a peculiar Favourite of Providence; that few Examples can parallel the Profusion of Blessings which have attended so long a Life of Felicity. A Person so attractive! a Husband so memorably great! an Offspring so beautiful! a Fortune so immense! and a Title, which (when royal Favour had no higher to bestow) she only cou'd receive from the Author of Nature; a great Grandmother without grey Hairs! These are such consummate Indulgencies, that we might think Heaven has center'd them all in one Person, to let us see how far, with a lively Understanding, the full Possession of them could contribute to human Happiness.—I now return to our military Affairs.

From *Nottingham* our Troops march'd to *Oxford*; through every Town we pass'd the People came out, in some sort of Order, with such rural, and rusty Weapons as they had, to meet us, in Acclamations of welcome, and good wishes. This, I thought, promis'd a favourable End of our Civil War, when the Nation seem'd so willing to be all of a Side! At *Oxford* the Prince and Princess of *Denmark* met, for the first time, after their late Separation, and had all possible Honours paid them by the University. Here we rested in quiet Quarters for several Weeks, till the Flight of King *James* into *France*; when the Nation being left to take care of it self, the only Security that could be found for it, was to advance the Prince and Princess of *Orange* to the vacant Throne. The publick Tranquility being now settled, our Forces were remanded back to *Nottingham*. Here all our Officers, who had commanded them from their first rising, receiv'd Commissions to confirm them in their  
several

#### 44 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

several Posts ; and at the same time, such private Men as chose to return to their proper Business or Habitations, were offer'd their Discharges. Among the small number of those, who receiv'd them, I was one ; for not hearing that my Name was in any of these new Commissions, I thought it time for me to take my leave of Ambition, as Ambition had before seduc'd me from the Imaginary Honours of the Gown, and therefore resolv'd to hunt my Fortune in some other Field.

From *Nottingham* I again return'd to my Father at *Chattsworth*, where I staid till my Lord came down, with the new Honours of Duke of *Devonshire*, Lord Steward of his Majesty's Household, and Knight of the garter ! a noble turn of Fortune ! and a deep Stake he had play'd for ! which calls to my Memory a Story we had then in the Family, which though too light for our graver Historians notice, may be of weight enough for my humble Memoirs. This noble Lord being in the Presence-Chamber, in King *James's* time, and known to be no Friend to the Measures of his Administration ; a certain Person in favour there, and desirous to be more so, took occasion to tread rudely upon his Lordship's Foot, which was returned with a sudden Blow upon the Spot : For this Misdemeanour his Lordship was fin'd thirty thousand Pounds ; but I think had some time allow'd him for the Payment. In the Summer preceding the Revolution when his Lordship was retir'd to *Chattsworth*, and had been there deeply engag'd with other Noblemen, in the Measures, which soon after brought it to bear, King *James* sent a Person down to him, with Offers to mitigate his Fine, upon Conditions of ready Payment, to which his Lordship reply'd, that if his Majesty pleas'd to allow him a little longer time, he would rather chuse to play *double* or *quit* with him : The time of the intended Rising being then so near at hand, the Demand, it seem'd, came too late for a more serious Answer.

How-

However low my Pretensions to Preferment were at this time, my Father thought that a little Court Favour added to them, might give him a Chance for saving the Expence of maintaining me, as he had intended at the University : He therefore order'd me to draw up a Petition to the Duke, and to give it some Air of Merit, to put it into *Latin*, the Prayer of which was, that his Grace would be pleas'd to do something ( I really forget what ) for me——However the Duke upon receiving it, was so good as to desire my Father would send me to *London* in the Winter, where he would consider of some Provision for me. It might, indeed, well require time to consider it ; for I believe it was then harder to know what I was really fit for, than to have got me any thing I was not fit for : However, to *London* I came, where I enter'd into my first State of Attendance and Dependance for about five Months, till the *February* following. But alas ! in my Intervals of Leisure, by frequently seeing Plays, my wife Head was turn'd to higher Views, I saw no Joy in any other Life than that of an Actor, so that (as before, when a Candidate at *Winchester* ) I was even afraid of succeeding to the Preferment I sought for : 'Twas on the Stage alone I had form'd a Happiness preferable to all that Camps or Courts could offer me, and there was I determin'd, let Father and Mother take it as they pleas'd, to fix my *non ultra*. Here I think myself oblig'd, in respect to the Honour of that noble Lord, to acknowledge, that I believe his real Intentions to do well for me, were prevented by my own inconsiderate Folly ; so that if my Life did not then take a more laudable Turn, I have no one but myself to reproach for it : for I was credibly inform'd by the Gentlemen of his Household, that his Grace had, in their hearing, talk'd of recommending me to the Lord *Shrewsbury*, then Secretary of State, for the first proper Vacancy in that Office. But the distant Hope of a Reversion was too cold a Temptation for a Spirit impatient as mine, that wanted immediate Possession of what my Heart was so differently set upon. The Allurements

lurements of a Theatre are still so strong in my Memory, that perhaps few, except those who have felt them, can conceive: And I am yet so far willing to excuse my Folly, that I am convinc'd, were it possible to take off that Disgrace and Prejudice, which Custom has thrown upon the Profession of an Actor, many a well-born younger Brother, and Beauty of low Fortune would gladly have adorn'd the Theatre, who by their not being able to brook such Dishonour to their Birth, have pass'd away their Lives decently unheeded and forgotten.

Many Years ago, when I was first in the Management of the Theatre, I remember a strong Instance, which will shew you what degree of Ignominy the Profession of an Actor was then held at — A Lady, with a real Title, whose female Indiscretions had occasion'd her Family to abandon her, being willing, in her distress to make an honest Penny of what Beauty she had left, desir'd to be admitted as an Actress; when before she could receive our Answer, a Gentleman (probably by her Relation's Permission) advis'd us not to entertain her, for Reasons easy to be guess'd. You may imagine we could not be so blind to our Interest as to make an honourable Family our unnecessary Enemies, by not taking his Advice; which the Lady too being sensible of, saw the Affair had its Difficulties; and therefore pursu'd it no farther. Now is it not hard that it should be a doubt, whether this Lady's Condition or ours were the more melancholy? For here, you find her honest Endeavour, to get Bread from the Stage, was look'd upon as an Addition of new Scandal to her former Dishonour! so that I am afraid, according to this way of thinking, had the same Lady stoop'd to have sold Patches and Pomatum, in a Band-box, from Door to Door, she might, in that Occupation have starv'd, with less Infamy, than had she reliev'd her Necessities by being famous on the Theatre. Whether this Prejudice may have arisen from the Abuses that so often have crept in upon the Stage, I am not clear in; tho' when that is grossly the Case, I will allow there ought to be no Limits set to the Contempt  
of



of it; yet in its lowest Condition, in my time, methinks there could have been no great Pretence of preferring the Band-box to the Buskin. But this severe Opinion, whether merited, or not, is not the greatest Distress that this Profession is liable to.

I shall now give you another Anecdote, quite the Reverse of what I have instanc'd, wherein you will see an Actress, as hardly us'd for an Act of Modesty (which without being a Prude, a Woman, even upon the Stage, may sometimes think it necessary not to throw off.) This too I am forc'd to premise, that the Truth of what I am going to tell you, may not be sneer'd at before it be known. About the Year 1717, a young Actress, of a desirable Person, sitting in an upper Box at the Opera, a military Gentleman thought this a proper Opportunity to secure a little Conversation with her; the Particulars of which were, probably, no more worth repeating, than it seems the *Damoiselle* then thought them worth listening to; for, notwithstanding the fine Things he said to her, she rather chose to give the Musick the Preference of her Attention: This Indifference was so offensive to his high Heart, that he began to change the Tender, into the Terrible, and, in short, proceeded at last to treat her in a Sty'e too grossly insulting, for the meanest Female Far to endure unresented: Upon which, being beaten too far out of her Discretion, she turn'd hastily upon him, with an angry Look, and a Reply, which seem'd to set his Merit in so low a Regard, that he thought himself oblig'd, in Honour, to take his time to resent it: This was the full Extent of her Crime, which his Glory delay'd no longer to punish, than 'till the next time she was to appear upon the Stage: There in one of her best Parts, wherein she drew a favourable Regard and Approbation from the Audience, he, dispensing with the Respect which some people think due to a polite Assembly, began to interrupt her Performance, with such loud and various Notes of Mockery, as other young Men of Honour, in the same Place, have sometimes made themselves undaun-

undauntedly merry with : Thus, deaf to all Murmurs or Entreaties of those about him, he pursued his Point, even to throwing near her such Trash, as no Person can be suppos'd to carry about him, unless to use on so particular an Occasion.

A Gentleman, then behind the Scenes, being shock'd at his unmanly Behaviour, was warm enough to say, That no Man, but a Fool, or a Bully, cou'd be capable of insulting an Audience, or a Woman in so monstrous a manner. The former valliant Gentleman, to whose Ear the Words were soon brought, by his Spies, whom he had plac'd behind the Scenes, to observe how the Action was taken there, came immediately from the Pit, in a Heat, and demanded to know of the Author of those Words, if he was the Person that spoke them ? to which he calmly reply'd, That though he had never seen him before, yet, since he seem'd so earnest to be satisfy'd, he would do him the favour to own, That, indeed, the Words were his, and that they would be the last Words he should chuse to deny, whoever they might fall upon. To conclude, their Dispute was ended the next Morning in *Hyde-Park*, where the determin'd Combatant, who first ask'd for Satisfaction, was oblig'd afterwards to ask his Life too ; whether he mended it or not, I have not yet heard ; but his Antagonist, in a few Years after, died in one of the principal Posts of the Government.

Now though I have, sometimes, known these gallant Insulters of Audiences, draw themselves into Scrapes, which they have less honourably got out of ; yet, alas ! what has that avall'd ? This generous publick-spirited Method of silencing a few, was but repelling the Disease, in one Part, to make it break out in another : All Endeavours at Protection are new Provocations, to those who pride themselves in pushing their Courage to a Desfiance of Humanity. Even when a Royal Resentment has shewn it self, in the behalf of an injur'd Actor, it has been unable to defend him from farther Insults ! an Instance of which happen'd

in the late King *James's* time. *Mr. Smith* (whose Character as a Gentleman, could have been no way impeach'd, had he not degraded it, by being a celebrated Actor) had the Misfortune, in a Dispute with a Gentleman behind the Scenes, to receive a Blow from him: The same Night an account of this Action was carry'd to the King, to whom the Gentleman was represented so grossly in the wrong, that, the next Day, his Majesty sent to forbid him the Court upon it. This Indignity cast upon a Gentleman, only for having maltreated a Player, was look'd upon as the Concern of every Gentleman; and a Party was soon form'd to assert, and vindicate their Honour, by humbling this favour'd Actor, whose slight Injury had been judg'd equal to so severe a Notice. Accordingly, the next time *Smith* acted, he was receiv'd with a Chorus of Cat-calls, that soon convinc'd him, he should not be suffer'd to proceed in his Part; upon which, without the least Discomposure, he order'd the Curtain to be dropp'd; and, having a competent Fortune of his own, thought the Conditions of adding to it, by his remaining upon the Stage, were too dear, and from that Day entirely quitted it. I shall make no Observation upon the King's Resentment, or on that of his good Subjects; how far either was, or was not right, is not the point of dispute for: Be that as it may, the unhappy Condition of the Actor was so far from being reliev'd by this Royal Interposition in his favour, that it was the worse for it.

While these sort of real Distresses, on the Stage, are so unavoidable, it is no wonder that young people of Sense (though of low Fortune) should be so rarely found, to supply a Succession of good Actors. Why then may we not, in some measure, impute the Scarcity of them, to the wanton Inhumanity of those Spectators, who have made it so terribly mean to appear here? Were there no ground for this Question, where could be the Disgrace of entering into a Society, whose institution, when not abus'd, is a delightful School of Morality; and where to excel, requires as ample Endowments of Nature, as any one Profession (that

of holy Institution excepted) whatsoever? But, alas! as *Shakespeare* says,

*Where's that Palace, whereinto, sometimes  
Foul things intrude not?*

Look into *St. Peter's* at *Rome*, and see what a profitable Farce is made of Religion there! Why then is an Actor more blemish'd than a Cardinal? While the Excellence of the one arises from his innocently seeming what he is not, and the Eminence of the other, from the most impious Fallacies that can be impos'd upon human Understanding? If the best things, therefore, are most liable to Corruption, the Corruption of the Theatre is no Disproof of its innate and primitive Utility.

In this Light, therefore, all the Abuses of the Stage, all the low, loose, or immoral Supplements, to wit, whether, in making Virtue ridiculous, or Vice agreeable, or in the decorated Nonsense and Absurdities of pantomimical Trumpery, I give up to the Contempt of every sensible Spectator, as so much rank Theatrical popery. But cannot still allow these Enormities to impeach the profession, while they are so palpably owing to the deprav'd Taste of the Multitude. While Vice, and Farceical Folly, are the most profitable Commodities, why should we wonder that, time out of mind, the poor Comedian, when real Wit would bear no price, should deal in what would bring him most ready Money? But this, you will say, is making the Stage a Nursery of Vice and Folly, or at least keeping an open Shop for it. — I grant it: But who do you expect should reform it? The Actors? Why so? If People are permitted to buy it, without blushing, the Theatrical Merchant seems to have an equal Right to the Liberty of selling it, without Reproach. That this Evil wants a Remedy, is not to be contested; nor can it be denied, that the Theatre is as capable of being preserv'd, by a Reformation, as Matters of more Importance; which, for the Honour of our national Taste, I could wish were attempted; and then, if it  
could

could not subsist, under decent Regulations, by not being permitted to present any thing there, but what were *worthy* to be there, it would be time enough to consider, whether it were necessary to let it totally fall, or effectually support it.

Notwithstanding all my best Endeavours, to recommend the Profession of an Actor, to a more general Favour, I doubt, while it is liable to such Corruptions, and the Actor himself to such unlimited Insults, as I have already mention'd, I doubt, I say, we must still leave him a-drift, with his intrinsic Merit, to ride out the Storm as well as he is able.

However, let us now turn to the other side of this account, and see what Advantages stand there, to balance the Misfortunes I have laid before you. There we shall still find some valuable Articles of Credit, that, sometimes overpay his incidental Disgraces.

First, if he has Sense, he will consider, that as these Indignities are seldom or never offer'd him by People that are remarkable for any one good Quality, he ought not to lay them too close to his Heart: He will know too, that when Malice, Envy, or a brutal Nature, can securely hide or fence themselves in a Multitude, Virtue, Merit, Innocence, and even sovereign Superiority, have been, and must be equally liable to their Insults; that therefore, when they fall upon him in the same manner, his intrinsic Value cannot be diminish'd by them: On the contrary, if, with a decent and unruffled Temper, he lets them pass, the Disgrace will return upon his Aggressor, and perhaps warm the generous Spectator into a Partiality in his Favour.

That while he is conscious, that as an Actor, he must be always in the Hands of Injustice, it does him at least this involuntary Good, that it keeps him in a settled Resolution to avoid all Occasions of provoking it, or of even offending the lowest Enemy, who, at the Expence of a Shilling, may publickly revenge it.



That, if he excels on the Stage, and is irreproachable in his personal Morals, and Behaviour, his profession is so far from being an impeachment, that it will be oftner a just Reason for his being receiv'd among People of condition with Favour; and sometimes with a more social Distinction, than the best, though more profitable Trade he might have follow'd, could have recommended him to.

That this is a Happiness to which several Actors, within my Memory, as *Betterton*, *Smith*, *Montfort*, *Captain Griffin*, and *Mrs. Bracegirdle* (yet living) have arriv'd at; to which I may add the late celebrated *Mrs. Oldfield*. Now let us suppose these Persons, the Men, for example, to have been all eminent Merchants, and the Women as famous Milliners, can we imagine, that merely as such, though endow'd with the same natural Understanding, they could have been call'd into the same honourable Parties of Conversation? People of Sense and Condition, could not but know, it was impossible they could have had such various Excellencies on the Stage, without having something naturally valuable in them: And I will take upon me to affirm, who knew them all living, that there was not one of the number, who were not capable of supporting a variety of spirited Conversation, tho' the Stage were never to have been the Subject of it.

That, to have trod the Stage, has not always been thought a Disqualification from more honourable Employments; several have had military Commissions; *Carlisle* and *Wiltshire* were both kill'd Captains; one, in King *William's* Reduction of *Ireland*; and the other, in his first War, in *Flanders*; and the famous *Ben Johnson*, tho' an unsuccessful Actor, was afterwards made Poet-Laureat.

To these laudable Distinctions, let me add one more; that if publick Applause, which, when truly merited, is, perhaps, one of the most agreeable Gratifications that venial Vanity can feel. A happiness, almost peculiar to the Actor, insomuch that the best Tragick Writer, however numerous his separate Admirers may be, yet, to unite them into one general Act of Praise,

to receive at once, those thundering Peals of Approbation, which a crouded Theatre throws out, he must still call in the Assistance of the skilful Actor, to raise and partake of them.

In a Word, 'twas in this flattering Light only, though not perhaps so thoroughly consider'd, I look'd upon the Life of an Actor, when but eighteen Years of Age; nor can you wonder, if the Temptations were too strong for so warm a Vanity as mine to resist; but whether excusable, or not, to the Stage, at length I came, and it is from thence, chiefly, your Curiosity, if you have any left, is to expect a farther account of me.

#### C H A P. IV.

*A short View of the Stage, from the Year 1660 to the Revolution. The King's and Duke's Company united, composed the best Set of English Actors yet known. Their several Theatrical Characters.*

**T**HOU' I have only promis'd you an account of all the material Occurrences of the Theatre during my own Time; yet there was one which happen'd not above seven Years before my Admission to it, which may be as well worth notice, as the first great Revolution of it, in which, among numbers, I was involv'd. And as the one will lead you into a clearer View of the other, it may therefore be previously necessary to let you know that

King *Charles II.*, at his Restoration, granted two Patents, one to *Sir William Davenant*, and the other to *Henry Killigrew*, Esq; and their several Heirs and Assigns, for ever, for the forming of two distinct Companies of Comedians: The first were call'd the *King's Servants*, and acted at the Theatre-Royal in *Drury-*

*Lane*; and the other the *Duke's Company*, who acted at the Duke's Theatre in *Dorset-Garden*. About ten of the King's Company were on the Royal Household-Establishment, having each ten Yards of Scarlet Cloth, with a proper quantity of Lace allow'd them for Liveries; and in their Warrants from the Lord Chamberlain, were stiled *Gentlemen of the Great Chamber*: Whether the like appointments were extended to the Duke's Company, I am not certain; but they were both in high Estimation with the Publick, and so much the Delight and Concern of the Court, that they were not only supported by its being frequently present at their publick *Presentations*, but by its taking cognizance even of their private Government, inasmuch, that their particular Differences, Pretensions, or Complaints, were generally ended by the King, or Duke's personal Command or Decision. Besides their being thorough Masters of their Art, these Actors set forwards with two critical advantages, which perhaps may never happen again in many Ages. The one was their immediate opening for so long Interdiction of Plays, during the Civil War, and the Anarchy that follow'd it. What eager Appetites from so long a Fast, must the Guests of those Times have had, to that high and fresh variety of Entertainments, which *Shakespear* had left prepar'd for them? Never was a Stage so provided! A hundred Years are wasted; and another silent Century well advanced, and yet what unborn Age shall say, *Shakespear* has his Equal! How many shining Actors have the warm Scenes of his Genius given to Posterity? without being himself, in his action, equal to his Writing! a strong Proof that Actors, like Poets, must be born such. Eloquence and Elocution are quite different Talents: *Shakespear* cou'd write *Hamlet*; but Tradition tells us, That the *Ghost*, in the same Play, was one of his best Performances as an actor: Nor is it within the reach of Rule or Precept to complete either of them. Instruction, 'tis true, may guard them equally against Faults or Absurdities, but there it stops; nature must do the rest: To excel

cel in either Art, is a self-born Happiness, which something more than good Sense must be the Mother of.

The other Advantage I was speaking of, is, that before the Restoration, no Actresses had ever been seen upon the *English* Stage. The Characters of Women, on former Theatres, were perform'd by Boys, or young Men of the most effeminate Aspect. And what Grace, or Master strokes of Action can we conceive such ungain Hoydens to have been capable of? This Defect was so well consider'd by *Shakespear*, that in few of his Plays, he has any greater Dependance upon the Ladies, than in the Innocence and Simplicity of a *Desdemona*, an *Ophelia*, or in the short Specimen of a fond and virtuous *Portia*. The additional Objects then of a real, beautiful Woman, could not but draw a proportion of new Admirers to the Theatre. We may imagine too, that these Actresses were not ill chosen, when it is well known, that more than one of them had Charms sufficient at their leisure Hours, to calm and mollify the Cares of Empire. Besides these peculiar Advantages, they had a private Rule or Agreement, which both Houses were happily ty'd down to, which was, that no Play acted at one House, should ever be attempted at the other. All the capital Plays therefore of *Shakespear*, *Fletcher*, and *Ben. Johnson*, were divided between them, by the Approbation of the Court, and their own alternate Choice: So that when *Hart* was famous for *Othello*, *Betterton* had no less a Reputation for *Hamlet*. By this Order the Stage was supply'd with a greater variety of Plays than could possibly have been shewn, had both Companies been employ'd at the same time, upon the same Play: which Liberty too, must have occasion'd such frequent Repetitions of 'em, by their opposite Endeavours to forestal and anticipate one another, that the best Actors in the World must have grown tedious and tasteless to the Spectator: For what Pleasure is not languid to Satiety? It was therefore one of our greatest Happinesses (during my time of being in the Management of the Stage) that  
we

## 56 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

we had a certain number of select Plays, which no other Company had the good Fortune to make a tolerable Figure in, and consequently, could find little or no Account, by acting them against us. These Plays therefore, for many Years, by not being too often seen, never fail'd to bring us crowded Audiences; and it was to this Conduct we ow'd no little share of our Prosperity. But when our Houses are at once (as very lately they were) all permitted to act the same Pieces, let three of them perform never so ill, when Plays come to be so harra's'd and hackney'd out to common People (half of which too, perhaps would as lieve see them at one House as another) the best Actors will soon feel that the Town has enough of them.

I know it is the common Opinion, That the more Play-houses, the more Emulation; I grant it; but what has this Emulation ended in? Why, a daily Contention which shall soonest surfeit you with the best Plays; so that when what *ought* to please, can no longer please, your Appetite is again to be rais'd by such monstrous Presentations, as dishonour the Taste of a civiliz'd People. If, indeed, to our several Theatres, we could raise a proportionable number of good Authors, to give them all different Employment, then, perhaps, the Publick might profit from their Emulation: But while good Writers are so scarce, and undaunted Criticks so plenty, I am afraid a good Play, and a blazing Star, will be equal Rarities. This voluptuous Expedient, therefore, of indulging the Taste with several Theatres, will amount to much the same variety as that of a certain Oeconomist, who, to enlarge his Hospitality would have two Puddings, and two Legs of Mutton, for the same Dinner.—But, to resume the Thread of my History.

These two excellent Companies were both prosperous for some few Years, till their Variety of Plays began to be exhausted: Then of course, the better Actors (which the King's seem to have been allow'd) could not fail of drawing the greater Audiences.



Sir *William Davenant*, therefore, Master of the Duke's Company, to make Head against their Success, was forc'd to add Spectacle and Musick to Action; and to introduce a new Species of Plays, since call'd Dramatick Opera's, of which kind were the *Tempest*, *Psyche*, *Circe*, and others, all set off with the most expensive Decorations of Scenes and Habits, with the best Voices and Dancers.

This sensual Supply of Sight and Sound, coming in to the Assistance of the weaker Party, it was no Wonder they should grow too hard for Sense and simple Nature, when it is consider'd how many more People there are, that can see and hear, than think and judge. So wanton a Change of the publick Taste, therefore, began to fall as heavy upon the King's Company, as their greater Excellence in Action, had, before, fallen upon their Competitors: Of which Encroachment upon Wit, several good Prologues in those Days frequently complain'd.

But alas! what can Truth avail, when its Dependance is much more upon the Ignorant, than the sensible Auditor? a poor Satisfaction, that the due Praise given to it, must at last, sink into the cold Comfort of———*Laudatur & Alget*. Unprofitable Praise can hardly give it a *Soup maigre*. Taste and Fashion, with us, have always had Wings, and fly from one publick Spectacle to another so wantonly, that I have been inform'd, by those, who remember it, that a famous Puppet-shew, in *Salisbury* Change (then standing where *Cecil-Street* now is) so far distress'd these two celebrated Companies, that they are reduc'd to petition the King for Relief against it: Nor ought we perhaps to think this strange, when, if I mistake not, *Terence* himself reproaches the *Roman* Auditors of his Time, with the like Fondness for the *Funambuli*, the Rope dancers. Not to dwell too long therefore upon that Part of my History, which I have only collected, from oral Tradition, I shall content my self with telling you, that *Mobun*, and *Hart* now growing old (for, above thirty Years before this Time, they had severally born the King's Commission of Major and Captain,

Captain, in the Civil Wars) and the younger Actors, as *Goodman, Clark*, and others, being impatient to get into their Parts, and growing intractable, the Audiences too of both Houses then falling off, the Patentees of each, by the King's Advice, which perhaps amounted to a Command, united their Interests, and both Companies into one. exclusive of all others, in the Year 1684. This Union was, however, so much in favour of the Duke's Company, that *Hart* left the Stage upon it, and *Mohun* surviv'd not long after.

One only Theatre being now in Possession of the whole Town, the united Patentees impos'd their own Terms, upon the Actors; for the Profits of acting were then divided into twenty Shares, ten of which went to the Proprietors, and the other Moiety to the principal Actors, in such Sub-divisions as their different Merit might pretend to. These Shares of the Patentees were promiscuously sold out to Money-making Persons, call'd Adventurers, who tho' utterly ignorant of Theatrical Affairs, were still admitted to a proportionate Vote in the Management of them; all particular Encouragements to Actors, were by them, of Consequence, look'd upon as so many Sums deducted from their private Dividends. While therefore the Theatrical Hive had so many Drones in it, the labouring Actors, sure, were under the highest Discouragement, if not a direct State of Oppression. Their Hardship will at least appear in a much stronger Light, when compar'd to our latter Situation, who with scarce half their Merit, succeeded to be Sharers under a Patent upon five times easier Conditions: For as they had but half the Profits divided among ten, or more of them; we had three fourths of the whole Profits, divided only among three of us: And as they might be said to have ten Task-masters over them, we never had but one Assistant-manager (not an Actor) join'd with us; who, by the Crown's Indulgence was sometimes too of our own chusing. Under this heavy Establishment then groan'd this United Company, when I was first admitted into the lowest Rank of it. How they came to be reliev'd by King *William's* Licence

## *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 59

Licence in 1695, how they were again dispers'd, early in Queen *Anne's* Reign; and from what Accidents Fortune took better care of *us*, their unequal Successors, will be told in its Place: But to prepare you for the opening so large a Scene of their History, methinks I ought, (in Justice to their Memory too) to give you such particular Characters of their Theatrical Merit, as in my plain Judgment they seem'd to deserve. Presuming then, that this Attempt may not be disagreeable to the Curious, or the true Lovers of the Theatre, take it without farther Preface.

In the Year 1690, when I first came into this Company, the principal Actors then at the Head of it were,

### Of Men.

Mr. *Betterton*,  
Mr. *Monfort*,  
Mr. *Kynaston*,  
Mr. *Sandford*,  
Mr. *Nokes*,  
Mr. *Underhil*, and  
Mr. *Leigh*.

### Of Women.

Mrs. *Betterton*,  
Mrs. *Barry*,  
Mrs. *Leigh*,  
Mrs. *Butler*,  
Mrs. *Monfort*, and  
Mrs. *Bracegirdle*.

These Actors, whom I have selected from their Contemporaries, were all original Masters in their different Stile, not meer auricular Imitators of one another, which commonly is the highest Merit of the middle Rank; but Self-judges of nature, from whose various Lights they only took their true Instruction. If in the following Account of them, I may be oblig'd to hint at the Faults of others, I never mean such Observations should extend to those who are now in Possession of the Stage; for as I design not my Memoirs shall come down to their Time, I would not lie under the Imputation of speaking in their Disfavour to the Publick, whose Approbation they must depend upon for Support. But to my Purpose.

*Betterton* was an Actor, as *Shakespear* was an Author, both without Competitors! form'd for the mutual Assistance, and Illustration of each others Genius!  
How

60 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

How *Shakespear* wrote, all Men who have a Taste for Nature may read, and know——— but with what higher Rapture would he still be *read*, could they conceive how *Betterton* play'd him! Then might they know, the one was born alone to speak what the other only knew, to write! Pity it is, that the momentary Beauties flowing from an harmonious Elocution, cannot like those of Poetry, be their own Record! That the animated Graces of the Player can live no longer than the instant Breath and Motion that presents them; or at best can but faintly glimmer through the Memory, or imperfect Attestation of a few surviving Spectators. Could *how Betterton* spoke be as easily known as *what* he spoke; then might you see the Muse of *Shakespear* in her Triumph, with all their Beauties in their best Array, rising into real Life, and charming her Beholders. But alas! since all this is so far out of the reach of Description, how shall I shew you *Betterton*? Should I therefore tell you, that all the *Othellos*, *Hamlets*, *Hotspurs*, *Mackbeths*, and *Brutus's*, whom you may have seen since his time have fallen far short of him: This still would give you no Idea of his particular Excellence. Let us see then what a particular Comparison may do! whether that may yet draw him nearer to you?

You have seen a *Hamlet* perhaps, who, on the first appearance of his Father's Spirit, has thrown himself into all the straining Voelferation requisite to express Rage and Fury, and the House has thunder'd with Applause; tho' the mis-guided Actor was all the while (as *Shakespear* terms it) tearing a Passion into Rags----I am the more bold to offer you this particular Instance, because the late Mr. *Addison*, while I sat by him, to see this Scene acted, made the same Observation, asking me with some Surprize, if I thought *Hamlet* should be in so violent a Passion with the Ghost, which tho' it might have astonish'd, it had not provok'd him? for you may observe that in this beautiful Speech, the Passion never rises beyond an almost breathless Astonishment, or an Impatience, limited by filial Reverence, to enquire into the suspected  
Wrongs

Wrongs that may have rais'd him from his peaceful Tomb! and a Desire to know what a Spirit so seemingly distressed, might wish or enjoin a sorrowful Son to execute towards his future Quiet in the Grave? This was the Light into which *Betterton* threw this Scene; which he open'd with a Pause of mute Amazement! then rising slowly, to a solemn, trembling Voice, he made the Ghost equally terrible to the Spectator, as to himself! and in the descriptive part of the natural Emotions which the ghastly Vision gave him, the boldness of his Expostulation was still govern'd by Decency, manly, but not braving; his Voice never rising into that seeming Outrage, or wild Defiance of what he naturally rever'd. But alas! to preserve this Medium, between mouthing, and meaning too little, to keep the attention more pleasingly awake, by a temper'd Spirit, than by meer Vehemence of Voice, is of all the Master-strokes of an Actor the most difficult to reach. In this none yet have equall'd *Betterton*. But I am unwilling to shew his Superiority only, recounting the Errors of those, who now cannot answer to them, let their farther Failings therefore be forgotten! or rather shall I in some measure excuse them? For I am not yet sure, that they might not be as much owing to the false Judgment of the Spectator, as the Actor. While the Million are so apt to be transported, when the Drum of their Ear is so roundly rattled; while they take the Life of Elocution to lie in the Strength of the Lungs, it is no wonder the Actor, whose end is applause, should be so often tempted, at this easy rate, to excite it. Shall I go a little farther? and allow that this Extreme is more pardonable than its opposite Error. I mean that dangerous affectation of the Monotone, or solemn Sameness of Pronunciation, which to my Ear is insupportable; for of all Faults that so frequently pass upon the Vulgar, that of Flatness will have the fewest admirers. That this is an Error of ancient standing seems evident by what *Hamlet* says, in his Instructions to the Players, *viz.*

*Be not too tame, neither, &c.*

G

The



## 62 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

The Actor, doubtless, is as strongly ty'd down to the Rules of *Horace*, as the Writer.

*Si vis me flere, dolendum est  
Primum ipsi tibi—*

He that feels not himself the Passion he would raise, will talk to a sleeping Audience : But this never was the Fault of *Betterton* ; and it has often amaz'd me, to see those who soon came after him, throw out in some Parts of a Character, a just and graceful Spirit, which *Betterton* himself could not but have applauded. And yet in the equally shining Passages of the same Character, have heavily dragg'd the Sentiment along, like a dead Weight ; with a long ton'd Voice, and absent Eye, as if they had fairly forgot what they were about : If you have never made this Observation, I am contented you should not know, where to apply it.

A farther Excellence in *Betterton*, was that he could vary his Spirit to the different Characters he acted. Those wild impatient Starts, that fierce and flashing Fire, which he threw into *Hotspur*, never came from the unruffled Temper of his *Brutus* (for I have, more than once seen a *Brutus* as warm as *Hotspur*) when the *Betterton Brutus* was provok'd, in his Dispute with *Cassius*, his Spirit flew only to his Eye ; his steady Look alone supply'd that Terror, which he disdain'd an Intemperance in his Voice should rise to. Thus, with a settled Dignity of Contempt, like an unheeding Rock, he repell'd upon himself the Foam of *Cassius*. Perhaps the very Words of *Shakespeare* will better let you into my Meaning :

*Must I give way, and room, to your rash Choler?  
Shall I be frighted when a Madman Raves ?*

And a little after,

*There is no Terror, Cassius, in your Looks ! &c.*

No

Not but, in some part of this Scene, where he reproaches *Cassius*, his Temper is not under this Suppression, but opens into that Warmth which becomes a Man of Virtue; yet this is that *passy Spark* of anger, which *Brutus* himself endeavours to excuse.

But with whatever strength of Nature we see the Poet shew, at once, the Philosopher and the Heroe, yet the Image of the Actor's Excellence will be still imperfect to you, unless Language cou'd put Colours in our Words to paint the Voice with.

*Et, si vis similem pingere, pingere sonum*, is enjoining an Impossibility. The most that a *Vandyke* can arrive at, is to make his Portraits of great Persons seem to think; a *Shakespeare* goes farther yet, and tells you what his Pictures thought; a *Betterton* steps beyond 'em both, and calls them from the Grave, to breathe, and be themselves again, in Feature, Speech, and Motion. When the skilful Actor shews you all these Powers united, and gratifies at once your Eye, your Ear, your Understanding. To conceive the Pleasure rising from such Harmony, you must have been present at it! 'tis not to be told you!

There cannot be a stronger Proof of the Charms of harmonious Elocution, than the many, even unnatural Scenes and Flights of the false Sublime it has list'd into applause. In what Raptures have I seen an Audience, at the furious Fustian and turgid Rants in *Nat. Lee's Alexander the Great*! For though I can allow this Play a few great Beauties, yet it is not without its extravagant Blemishes. Every Play of the same Author has more or less of them. Let me give you a Sample from this. *Alexander* in a full crowd of Courtiers, without being occasionally call'd or provok'd to it, falls into this Rhapsody of Vain-glory.

*Can none remember? Yes, I know all must!*

And therefore they shall know it agen.

## 64 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

*When Glory, like the dazling Eagle, stood  
Perch'd on my Beaver, in the Granic Flood,  
When Fortune's Standard trembling bore,  
And the pale Fates stood frighted on the Shore,  
When the Immortals on the Billows rode,  
And I myself appear'd the leading God.*

When these flowing Numbers came from the Mouth of a *Betterton*, the Multitude no more desired Sense to them, than our musical *Connoisseurs* think it essential in the celebrate *Airs* of an *Italian Opera*. Does not this prove, that there is very near as much Enchantment in the well-govern'd Voice of an Actor, as in the sweet pipe of an Eunuch? If I tell you, there was no one Tragedy, for many Years, more in favour with the Town than *Alexander*, to what must we impute this its command of publick Admiration? Not to its intrinsic Merit, surely, if it swarms with Passages like this I have shewn you! If this passage has Merit, let us see what Figure it would make upon Canvas, what sort of Picture would rise from it. If *Le Brun*, who was famous for painting the Battles of this Heroe, had seen this lofty Description, what one Image could he have possibly taken from it? In what Colours would he have shewn us *Glory perch'd upon a Beaver*? How would he have drawn *Fortune trembling*? Or, indeed, what use could he have made of *pale Fates*, or *Immortals* riding upon *Billows*, with this blustering God of his own making at the head of 'em? Where, then, must have lain the Charm, that once made the Publick so partial to this Tragedy? Why plainly, in the Grace and Harmony of the Actor's Utterance. For the Actor himself is not accountable for the false Poetry of his Author; That, the Hearer is to judge of; it passes upon him, the Actor can have no Quarrel to it; who, if the Periods given him are round, smooth, spirited, and high-sounding, even in a false Passion, must throw out the same Fire and Grace, as may be required in one justly rising from Nature; where those

his

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 65

his Excellencies will then be only more pleasing, in proportion to the Taste of his Hearer. And I am of opinion, that to the extraordinary Success of this very Play, we may impute the Corruption of so many Actors, and Tragick Writers, as were immediately misled by it. The unskillful Actor, who imagin'd all the Merit of delivering those blazing Rants, lay only in the Strength, and strain'd Exertion of the Voice, began to tear his Lungs, upon every false, or slight Occasion, to arrive at the same applause. And it is from hence I date our having seen the same Reason prevalent, for above fifty Years. Thus equally misguided too, many a barren-brain'd Author has stream'd into a frothy flowing Style, pompously rolling into sounding Periods, signifying ——— roundly nothing; of which Number, in some of my former Labours, I am something more than suspicious, that I may myself have made one. But, to keep a little closer to *Betterton*.

When this favourite Play I am speaking of, from its being too frequently acted, was worn out, and came to be deserted by the Town, upon the sudden Death of *Monfort*, who had play'd *Alexander* with Success, for several Years, the Part was given to *Betterton*, which, under this great Disadvantage of the Satiety it had given, he immediately reviv'd, with so new a Lustre, that for three Days together it fill'd the House; and had his then declining Strength been equal to the Fatigue the action gave him, it probably might have doubled its Success; an uncommon Instance of the Power and intrinsic Merit of an Actor. This I mention, not only to prove what irresistible Pleasure may arise from a judicious Elocution, with scarce Sense to assist it; but to shew you too, that tho' *Betterton* never wanted Fire, and Force, when his Character demanded it; yet where it was not demanded, he never prostituted his Power to the low ambition of a false applause. And further, that when, from a too advanc'd age, he resign'd that toilsome part of *Alexander*, the Play, for many Years after, never was able to impose upon the

66 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

Publick; and I look upon his so particularly supporting the false Fire and Extravagancies of that Character, to be a more surprizing Proof of his Skill, than his being eminent in those of *Shakespear*; because there, Truth and Nature coming to his Assistance, he had not the same Difficulties to combat, and consequently, we must be less amaz'd at his Success, where we are more able to account for it.

Notwithstanding the extraordinary Power he shew'd in blowing *Alexander* once more into a blaze of admiration, *Betterton* had so just a Sense of what was true, or false applause, that I have heard him say, he never thought any kind of it equal to an attentive Silence; that there were many ways of deceiving an Audience into a loud one; but to keep them hush'd and quiet, was an applause which only Truth and Merit could arrive at: Of which art, there never was an equal Master to himself. From these various Excellencies, he had so full a Possession of the Esteem and Regard of his Auditors, that upon his Entrance into every Scene, he seem'd to seize upon the Eyes and Ears of the Giddy and Inadvertent! To have talk'd, or look'd another way, would then have been thought Insensibility, or Ignorance. In all his Soliloquies of moment, the strong Intelligence of his attitude and aspect, drew you into such an impatient Gaze, and eager Expectation, that you almost imbib'd the Sentiment with your Eye, before the Ear could reach it.

As *Betterton* is the Centre to which all my Observations upon Action tend, you will give me leave, under his Character, to enlarge upon that Head. In the just Delivery of poetical Numbers, particularly where the Sentiments are pathetick, it is scarce credible, upon how minute an Article of Sound depends their greatest Beauty or Inaffection. The Voice of a Singer is not more strictly ty'd to Time and Tune, than that of an Actor in Theatrical Elocution: The least Syllable too long, or too slightly dwelt upon, in a Period, depreciates it to nothing; which very Syllable, if rightly touch'd, shall, like the heightening Stroke of Light  
from



from a Master's Pencil give Life and Spirit to the whole: I never heard a Line in Tragedy come from *Betterton*, wherein my Judgment, my Ear, and my Imagination, were not fully satisfy'd; which, since his Time, I cannot equally say of any one Actor whatsoever: Not but it is possible to be much his Inferior, with great Excellencies; which I shall observe in another place. Had it been practicable to have ty'd down the clattering Hands of all the ill Judges who were commonly the Majority of an Audience, to what amazing Perfection might the *English* Theatre have arriv'd, with so just an Actor as *Betterton* at the Head of it! If what was Truth only, could have been applauded, how many noisy Actors had shook their Plumes with shame, who, from the injudicious Approbation of the Multitude, have bawl'd and strutted, in the place of Merit? If therefore the bare speaking Voice has such Allurements in it, how much less ought we to wonder, however we may lament, that the sweeter Notes of Vocal Musick should so have captivated even the politer World, into an apostacy from Sense, to an Idolatry of Sound. Let us enquire from whence this Enchantment rises. I am afraid it may be too naturally accounted for: For when we complain, that the finest Musick, purchas'd at such vast Expence, is so often thrown away upon the most miserable Poety, we seem not to consider, that when the Movement of the Air, and Tone of the Voice, are exquisitely harmonious, tho' we regard not one *Word* of what we hear, yet the Power of the Melody is so busy in the Heart, that we naturally annex Ideas to it of our own Creation, and, in some sort, become ourselves the Poet to the Composer; and what Poet is so dull as not to be charm'd with the Child of his own Fancy? So that there is even a kind of Language in agreeable Sounds, which, like the aspect of Beauty, without Words, speaks and plays with the Imagination. While this Taste therefore is so naturally prevalent, I doubt, to propose Remedies for it, were but giving Laws to the Winds, or Advice to Inamorato's: And however gravely we may assert, that Profit ought al-

ways

ways to be inseparable from the Delight of the Theatre; nay admitting that the pleasure would be heighten'd by the uniting them; yet, while Instruction is so little the Concern of the Auditor, how can we hope that so choice a Commodity will come to a Market where there is so seld in a Demand for it?

It is not to the Actor therefore, but to the vitiated and low Taste of the Spectator, that the Corruptions of the Stage (of what kind soever) have been owing. If the Publick, by whom they must live, had Spirit enough to discountenance, and declare against all the Trash and Fopperies they have been so frequently fond of, both the Actors, and the Authors, to the best of their Power, must naturally have serv'd their daily Table, with sound and wholesome Diet.—But I have not yet done with my Article of Elocution.

As we have sometimes great Composers of Musick, who cannot sing, we have as frequently great Writers that cannot read; and tho', without the nicest Ear, no Man can be Master of poetical Numbers, yet the best Ear in the World will not always enable him to pronounce them. Of this Truth, *Dryden*, our first great Master of Verse and Harmony, was a strong Instance: When he brought his Play of *Amphytrion* to the Stage, I heard him give it his first Reading to the Actors, in which, though it is true, he deliver'd the plain Sense of every period, yet the whole was in so cold, so flat, and unaffecting a manner, that I am afraid of not being believ'd, when I affirm it.

On the contrary, *Lee*, far his Inferior in Poetry, was so pathetick a Reader of his own Scenes, that I have been inform'd by an Actor, who was present, that while *Lee* was reading to Major *Mobun* at a Rehearsal, *Mobun*, in the Warmth of his admiration, threw down his Part, and said, unless I were able to *play* it, as well as you *read* it, to what purpose should I undertake it? And yet this very Author, whose Elocution rais'd admiration in so capital an Actor, when he attempted  
to

to be an Actor himself, soon quitted the Stage, in an honest Despair of ever making any profitable Figure there. From all this I would infer, That let our Conception of what we are to speak, be ever so just, and the Ear ever so true, yet, when we are to deliver it to an Audience (I will leave I ear out of the question) there must go along with the whole, a natural Freedom, and becoming Grace, which is easier to conceive than to describe: For without this inexpressible somewhat, the Performance will come out oddly disguis'd, or somewhere defectively, unsurprizing to the Hearer. Of this Defect too, I will give you yet a stranger Instance, which you will allow Fear could not be the Occasion of: If you remember *Estcourt*, you must have known that he was long enough upon the Stage, not to be under the least Restraint from Fear, in his Performance: This Man was so amazing and extraordinary a Mimick, that no Man or Woman, from the Coquette to the Privy-Counsellor, ever mov'd or spoke before him, but he could carry their Voice, Look, Mein, and Motion, instantly into another Company: I have heard him make long Harangues, and form various Arguments, even in the manner of thinking, of an eminent Pleader at the Bar, with every the least Article and Singularity of his Utterance so perfectly imitated, that he was the very *alter ipse*, scarce to be distinguish'd from his Original. Yet more; I have seen, upon the Margin of the written part of *Falstaff*, which he acted, his own Notes and Observations upon almost every Speech of it, describing the true Spirit of the Humour, and with what tone of Voice, Look, and Gesture, each of them ought to be delivered. Yet in his Execution upon the Stage, he seem'd to have lost all those just Ideas he had form'd of it, and almost thro' the Character, labour'd under a heavy Load of Flatness; In a word, with all his Skill in Mimickry, and Knowledge of what ought to be done, he never, upon the Stage, could bring it truly into Practice, but was upon the whole, a languid, unaffecting Actor. After

I have shewn you so many necessary Qualifications, not one of which can be spar'd in true Theatrical Elocution, and have at the same time prov'd, that with the assistance of them all united, the whole may still come forth defective; what Talents shall we say will infallibly form an Actor? This, I confess, is one of Nature's Secrets, too deep for me to dive into; let us content our selves therefore with affirming, That *Genius*, which Nature only gives, only can complete him. This *Genius* then was so strong in *Betterton*, that it shone out in every Speech and Motion of him. Yet Voice, and Person, are such necessary Supports to it, that by the Multitude, they have been preferr'd to *Genius* itself, or at least often mistaken for it. *Betterton* had a Voice of that kind, which gave more Spirit to Terror, than to the softer Passions; of more Strength than Melody. The Rage and Jealousy of *Othello*, became him better than the Sighs and Tendernefs of *Castalio*: For tho' in *Castalio* he only excell'd others, in *Othello* he excell'd himself; which you will easily believe, when you consider, that in spite of his Complexion, *Othello* has more natural Beauties than the best Actor can find in all the Magazine of Poetry, to animate his Power, and delight his Judgment with.

The Person of this excellent Actor was suitable to his Voice, more manly than sweet, not exceeding the middle Stature, inclining to the corpulent; of a serious and penetrating aspect; his Limbs near the athletick, than the delicate proportion; yet however form'd, there arose from the Harmony of the whole a commanding Mein of Majesty, which the fairer-fac'd, or (as *Shakespear* calls 'em) the curled Darlings of his Time, ever wanted something to be equal Masters of. There was some Years ago, to be had, almost in every Print-shop, a *Metzotinto*, from *Kneller*, extremely like him.

In all I have said of *Betterton*, I confine myself to the Time of his Strength, and highest power in action, that you may make allowances from what he was able to execute at fifty, to what you might have seen of him

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 71

him at past seventy; for tho' to the last he was without his equal, he might not then be equal to his former self; yet so far was he from being ever overtaken, that for many Years after his decease, I seldom saw any of his parts, in *Shakespear*, supply'd by others, but it drew from me the Lamentation of *Ophelia* upon *Hamlet's* being unlike, what she had seen him.

——— *Ah! woe is me!*

*I have seen, what I have seen, see what I see!*

The last part this great Master of his Profession acted, was *Melantius* in the *Maid's Tragedy*, for his own Benefit; when being suddenly seiz'd by the Gout, he submitted, by extraordinary applications, to have his foot so far reliev'd, that he might be able to walk on the Stage, in a Slipper, rather than wholly disappoint his Auditors. He was observ'd that Day, to have exerted a more than ordinary Spirit, and met with suitable applause; but the unhappy Consequence of tampering with his Distemper was, that it flew into his Head, and kill'd him in three Days, (I think) in the seventy-fourth Year of his Age.

I once thought to have fill'd up my Work with a select Dissertation upon Theatrical action, but I find, by the Digressions I have been tempted to make in this account of *Betterton*, that all I can say upon that Head, will naturally fall in, and possibly be less tedious, if dispers'd among the various Characters of the particular Actors, I have promis'd to treat of; I shall therefore make use of those several Vehicles, which you will find waiting in the next Chapter, to carry you through the rest of the Journey, at your Leisure.

C H A P.



## C H A P. V.

*The Theatrical Characters of the Principal Actors, in the Year 1690, continu'd.*

*A few Words to Critical Auditors.*

**T**H<sup>O</sup>, as I have before observ'd, Women were not admitted to the Stage, 'till the Return of King Charles, yet it could not be so suddenly supply'd with them, but that there was still a necessity, for some time, to put the handsomest young Men into Petticoats; which *Kynaston* was then said to have worn, with Success; particularly in the part of *Evadne*, in the *Maid's Tragedy*, which I have heard him speak of; and which calls to my Mind a ridiculous Distress that arose from these sorts of Shifts, which the Stage was then put to. — The King coming a little before his usual Time to a Tragedy, found the Actors not ready to begin, when his Majesty not chusing to have as much Patience as his good Subjects, sent to them, to know the Meaning of it; upon which the Master of the Company came to the Box, and rightly judging, that the best Excuse for their Default, would be the true one, fairly told his Majesty, that the Queen was not *shav'd* yet! The King, whose good Humour lov'd to laugh at a Jest, as well as to make one, accepted the Excuse, which serv'd to divert him, till the male Queen cou'd be effeminated. In a word, *Kynaston*, at that time, was so beautiful a Youth, that the Ladies of Quality prided themselves in taking him with them in their Coaches, to *Hyde-Park*, in his Theatrical Habit, after the Play; which in those Days, they might have sufficient time to do, because Plays then, were us'd to begin at four a Clock; The Hour that People of the same Rank, are now going to Dinner — Of this Truth, I had the Curiosity to enquire, and had it confirm'd from

from his own Mouth, in his advanc'd Age : And indeed, to the last of him, his handsomeness was very little abated ; ev'n at past sixty, his Teeth were all sound, white, and even, as one would wish to see, in a reigning Toast of twenty. He had something of a formal Gravity in his Mein, which was attributed to the stately Step he had been so early confin'd to, in a female Decency. But ev'n that, in Characters of Superiority had its proper Graces ; it misbecame him not in the Part of *Leon*, in *Fletcher's Rule a Wife*, &c. which he executed with a determin'd Manliness, and honest Authority, well worth the best Actor's Imitation. He had a piercing Eye, and in Characters of heroick Life, a quick imperious Vivacity, in his Tone of Voice, that painted the Tyrant truly terrible. There were two Plays of *Dryden* in which he shone, with uncommon Lustre ; in *Aureng-Zebe* he play'd *Morat*, and in *Don Sebastian*, *Muley Moloch* ; in both these Parts, he had a fierce, Lion-like Majesty in his Port and Utterance, that gave the Spectator a kind of trembling Admiration !

Here I cannot help observing upon a modest Mistake, which I thought the late Mr. *Booth* committed in his acting the Part of *Morat* : There are in this fierce Character so many Sentiments of avow'd Barbarity, Insolence, and Vain-glory, that they blaze even to a ludicrous Lustre, and doubtless the Poet intended these to make his Spectators laugh, while they admir'd them ; but *Booth* thought it depreciated the Dignity of Tragedy to raise a smile, in any part of it, and therefore cover'd these kind of Sentiments with a scrupulous Coldness, and unmoved Delivery, as if he had fear'd the Audience might take too familiar a Notice of them. In Mr. *Addison's Cato*, *Syphax* has some Sentiments of near the same Nature, which I ventur'd to speak, as I imagin'd *Kynaston* would have done, had he been then living to have stood in the same Character. Mr. *Addison*, who had something of Mr. *Booth's* Diffidence, at the Rehearsal of his Play, after it was acted, came into my Opinion, and own'd, that even Tragedy, on such particular Occasions might

74 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

admit of a *Laugh of Approbation*. In *Shakespear* Instances of them are frequent, as in *Mackbeth*, *Hotspur*, *Richard the Third*, and *Harry the Eighth*, all which Characters, tho' of a tragical Cast, have sometimes familiar Strokes in them, so highly natural to each particular Disposition, that it is impossible not to be transported into an honest Laughter at them: And these are those happy Liberties, which tho' few Authors are qualify'd to take, yet when justly taken, may challenge a Place among their greatest Beauties. Now whether *Dryden* in his *at, feliciter Audet*—or may be allow'd the Happiness of having hit this Mark, seems not necessary to be determin'd by the Actor; whose Business, sure, is to make the best of his Author's Intention, as in this Part *Kynaston* did, doubtless not without *Dryden's* Approbation. For these Reasons then, I thought my good Friend, Mr. *Booth* (who certainly had many Excellencies) carry'd his Reverence for the Buskin too far, in not following the bold Flights of the Author, with that Wantonness of Spirit which the Nature of those Sentiments demanded: For Example! *Morat* having a criminal Passion for *Indamora*, promises, at her Request, for one Day, to spare the Life of her Lover *Aurenge Zebe*: But not chusing to make known the real Motive of his Mercy, when *Nourmabal* says to him,

*'Twill not be safe to let him live an Hour!*

*Morat* silences her with this heroical *Rhedomontade*,

*I'll do't, to shew my Arbitrary Power.*

*Risum teneatis?* It was impossible not to laugh, and reasonably too, when this Line came out of the Mouth of *Kynaston*, with the stern, and haughty Look, that attended it. But above this tyrannical, tumid Superiority of Character, there is a grave, and rational Majesty in *Shakespear's* *Harry the Fourth*, which tho' not so glaring to the vulgar Eye, requires thrice the Skill, and Grace to become, and support. Of this real Majesty *Kynaston* was entirely Master; here every Sentiment

ment came from him, as if it had been his own, as if he had himself, that instant, conceiv'd it, as if he had lost the Player, and were the real King he personated ! a Perfection so rarely found, that very often, in Actors of good Repute, a certain Vacancy of Look, Inanity of Voice, or superfluous Gesture, shall unmask the Man, to the judicious Spectator ; who from the least of those Errors plainly sees, the whole but a Lesson given him, to be got by Heart, from some great Author, whose Sense is deeper than the Repeater's Understanding. This true Majesty *Kynaston* had so entire a Command of, that when he whisper'd the following plain Line to *Hotspur*,

*Send us your Prisoners, or you'll bear of it !*

He convey'd a more terrible Menace in it than the loudest Intemperance of Voice could swell to. But let the bold Imitator beware, for without the Look, and just Elocution that waited on it, an Attempt of the same nature may fall to nothing.

But the Dignity of this Character appear'd in *Kynaston* still more shining, in the private Scene between the King, and Prince his Son : There you saw Majesty, in that sort of Grief, which only Majesty could feel ! there the paternal Concern, for the Errors of the Son, made the Monarch more rever'd, and dreaded : His Reproaches so just, yet so unmixt with Anger (and therefore the more piercing) opening as it were the Arms of Nature, with a secret Wish, that filial Duty, and Penitence awak'd, might fall into them with Grace and Honour. In this affecting Scene I thought *Kynaston* shew'd his most masterly Strokes of Nature ; expressing all the various Motions of the Heart, with the same Force, Dignity, and Feeling they are written ; adding to the whole, that peculiar, and becoming Grace, which the best Writer cannot inspire into any Actor, that is not born with it. What made the Merit of this Actor, and that of *Betterton* more surprizing, was, that though they both observ'd the Rules of Truth, and Nature, they were each as different in their man-

## 76 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

ner of acting, as in their personal Form, and Features. But *Kynaston* staid too long upon the Stage, till his Memory and Spirit began to fail him. I shall not therefore say any thing of his Imperfections, which, at that time, were visibly not his own, but the Effects of decaying Nature.

*Monfort*, a younger Man by twenty Years, and at this time in his highest Reputation, was an Actor of a very different Style: Of Person he was tall, well made, fair, and of an agreeable Aspect: His Voice clear, full, and melodious: In Tragedy he was the most affecting Lover within my Memory. His Addresses had a resillless Recommendation from the very Tone of his Voice, which gave his Words such Softness, that, as *Dryden* says,

— *Like Flakes of feather'd Snow,*  
*They melted as they fell!*

All this he particularly verifi'd in that Scene of *Alexander*, where the Hero throws himself at the Foot of *Statira* for Pardon of his past Infidelities. There we saw the Great, the Tender, the Penitent, the Despairing, the Transported, and the Amiable, in the highest Perfection. In Comedy, he gave the truest Life to what we call the *Fine Gentleman*; his Spirit shone the brighter for being polish'd with Decency: In Scenes of Gaiety, he never broke into the Regard, that was due to the Presence of equal, or superior Characters, tho' inferior Actors play'd them; he fill'd the Stage, not by elbowing, and crossing it before others, or disconcerting their Action, but by surpassing them, in true and masterly Touches of Nature. He never laugh'd at his own Jest, unless the Point of his Raillery upon another requir'd it—He had a particular Talent, in giving Life to *bons Mots* and *Repartees*: The Wit of the Poet seem'd always to come from him *extempore*, and sharpen'd into more Wit, from his brilliant manner of delivering it; he had himself a good Share of it, or what is equal to it, so lively a Pleasantness of Humour, that when either of these fell into his Hands upon  
the



the Stage, he wantoned with them, to the highest delight of his Auditors. The agreeable was so natural to him, that even in that dissolute Character of the *Rover* he seem'd to wash off the guilt from Vice, and give it Charms and Merit. For tho' it may be a Reproach to the Poet, to draw such Characters, not only unpunish'd, but rewarded; the Actor may still be allow'd his due Praise in his excellent Performance. And this is a distinction which, when this Comedy was acted at *Whitehall*, King *William's* Queen *Mary* was pleas'd to make in favour of *Monfort*, notwithstanding her Disapprobation of the Play.

He had besides all this, a Variety in his Genius, which few capital Actors have shown, or perhaps have thought it any Addition to their Merit to arrive at; he could entirely change himself; could at once throw off the Man of Sense, for the brisk, vain, rude, and lively Coxcomb, the false, flashy Pretender to Wit, and the Dupe of his own Sufficiency: Of this he gave a delightful instance in the Character of *Sparkish* in *Wycherly's Country Wife*. In that of *Sir Courtly Nice* his Excellence was still greater: There his whole Man, Voice, Mien, and Gesture, was no longer *Monfort*, but another Person. There, the insipid, soft Civility, the elegant, and formal Mien; the drawling Delicacy of Voice, the stately Flatness of his Address, and the empty Eminence of his Attitudes were so nicely observ'd and guarded by him, that he had not been an entire Master of Nature, had he not kept his Judgment, as it were a Centinel upon himself, not to admit the least Likeness of what he us'd to be, to enter into any Part of his Performance, he could not possibly have so completely finish'd it. If some Years after the Death of *Monfort*, I my self had any Success, in either of these Characters, I must pay the Debt, I owe to his Memory, in confessing the Advantages I receiv'd from the just Idea, and strong Impression he had given me, from his acting them. Had he been remember'd, when I first attempted them, my Defects would have been more easily discover'd, and consequently my favourable Re-

## 78 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

ception in them, must have been very much, and justly abated. If it could be remembered how much he had the Advantage of me, in Voice and Passion, I could not, here, be suspected of an affected Modesty, or of over-valuing his Excellence : For he sung a clear Counter-tenor, and had a melodious, warbling Throat, which could not but set off the last Scene of *Sir Courtly* with an uncommon Happiness ; which I, alas ! could not only struggle thro', with the faint Excuses, and real Confidence of a fine Singer, under the Imperfection of a feign'd, and screaming Treble, which at best could only shew you what I would have done, had Nature been more favourable to me.

This excellent Actor was cut off by a tragical Death, in the 33d Year of his Age, generally lamented by his Friends, and all Lovers of the Theatre. The particular Accidents that attended his Fall, are to be found at large in the Trial of the Lord *Mobun*, printed among those of the State, in *Folio*.

*Sandford* might properly be term'd the *Spagnolet* of the Theatre, an excellent Actor in disagreeable Characters : For as the chief Pieces of that famous Painter were of Human Nature in Pain and Agony ; so *Sanford*, upon the Stage, was generally as flagitious as a *Creon*, a *Maligni*, an *Iago*, or a *Machiavil*, could make him. The Painter, 'tis true, from the Fire of his Genius might think the quiet Objects of Nature too tame for his Pencil, and therefore chose to indulge it in its full Power, upon those of Violence and Horror : But poor *Sandford* was not the Stage-villain by Choice, but from Necessity ; for having a low and crooked Person, such bodily Defects were too strong to be admitted into great, or amiable Characters ; so that whenever, in any new or revived Play, there was a hateful or mischievous Person, *Sanford* was sure to have no Competitor for it : Nor indeed (as we are not to suppose a Villain, or Traitor can be shewn for our Imitation, or not for our Abhorrence) can it be doubted, but the less comely the Actor's Person, the fitter he may be to perform them. The Spectator too, by not being misled by a tempting Form,

## The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c. 79

Form, may be less inclin'd to excuse the wicked or Immoral Views or Sentiments of them. And though the hard Fate of an *Oedipus*, might naturally give the Humanity of an Audience thrice the Pleasure that could arise from the wilful Wickedness of the best acted *Creon*; yet who could say that *Sandford*, in such a Part, was not Master of as true and just Action, as the best Tragedian could be, whose happier Person had recommended him to the virtuous Hero, or any other more pleasing Favourite of the Imagination? In this disadvantageous Light, then, stood *Sandford*, as an Actor; admir'd by the Judicious, while the Crowd only prais'd him by their Prejudice. And so unusual had it been to see *Sandford* an innocent Man in a Play, that whenever he was so, the Spectators would hardly give him Credit in so gross an Improbability. Let me give you an odd Instance of it, which I heard *Monfort* say was a real Fact. A new Play (the Name of it I have forgot) was brought upon the Stage, wherein *Sandford* happen'd to perform the Part of an honest Statesman: The Pit, after they had sate three or four Acts, in quiet Expectation, that the well-dissembled Honesty of *Sandford* (for such of course they concluded it) would soon be discover'd, or at least, from its Security, involve the Actors in the Play, in some surprizing Distress or Confusion, which might raise, and animate the Scenes to come; when, at last, finding no such matter, but that the Catastrophe had taken quite another Turn, and that *Sandford* was really an honest Man to the end of the Play, they fairly damn'd it, as if the Author had impos'd upon them the most frontless or incredible Absurdity.

It is not improbable, but that from *Sandford's* so masterly personating Characters of Guilt, the inferior Actors might think his Success chiefly owing to the Defects of his Person; and from thence might take occasion, whenever they appear'd as Bravos, or Murderers, to make themselves as frightful and as inhuman Figures, as possible. In King *Charles's* time, this low Skill was carry'd to such an Extravagance,

gance, that the King himself, who was black-brow'd, and of a swarthy Complexion, pass'd a pleasant Remark, upon his observing the grim Looks of the Murtherers in *Mackbeth*; when, turning to his People, in the Box about him, *Pray, what is the Meaning*, said he, *that we never see a Rogue in a Play, but, Godssb! they always clap him on a black Perriwig? when, it is well known, one of the greatest Rogues in England always wears a fair one?* Now, whether or no Dr. Oates, at that time, wore his own Hair, I cannot be positive: Or, if his Majesty pointed at some greater Man, then out of Power, I leave those to guess at him, who, may yet remember the changing Complexion of his Ministers. This Story I had from *Betterton*, who was a Man of Veracity: And, I confess, I should have thought the King's Observation a very just one, though he himself had been fair as *Adonis*. Nor can I, in this Question, help voting with the Court; for were it not too gross a Weakness to employ, in wicked Purposes, Men, whose very suspected Looks might be enough to betray them? Or are we to suppose it unnatural, that a Murther should be thoroughly committed out of an old red Coat, and a black Perriwig?

For my own part, I profess my self to have been an Admirer of *Sandford*, and have often lamented, that his masterly Performance could not be rewarded with that Applause, which I saw much inferior Actors met with, merely because they stood in more laudable Characters. For, tho' it may be a Merit in an Audience, to applaud Sentiments of Virtue and Honour; yet there seems to be an equal Justice, that no Distinction should be made, as to the Excellence of an Actor, whether in a good or evil Character; since neither the Vice, nor the Virtue of it, is his own, but given him by the Poet: Therefore, why is not the Actor who shines in either, equally commendable?——No, Sir; this may be Reason, but that is not always a Rule with us; the Spectator will tell you, that when Virtue is applauded, he gives part of it to himself; because his Ap-  
plause,

## *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c. 81*

plause, at the same time, lets others about him see, that he himself admires it. But when a wicked Action is going forward ; when an *Iago* is meditating Revenge, and Mischief ; tho' Art and Nature may be equally strong in the Actor, the Spectator is shy of his Applause, lest he should, in some sort, be look'd upon as an Aider or an Abettor of the Wickedness in view ; and therefore rather chuses to rob the Actor of the Praise he may merit, than give it him in a Character, which he would have you see his Silence modestly discourages. From the same fond Principle, many Actors have made it a point to be seen in parts sometimes, even flatly written, only because they stood in the favourable Light of Honour and Virtue.

I have formerly known an Actress carry this Theatrical Prudery to such a height, that she was, very near, keeping herself chaste by it : Her fondness for Virtue on the Stage, she began to think, might persuade the World, that it had made an Impression on her private Life ; and Appearances of it actually went so far, that, in an Epilogue to an obscure Play, the Profits of which were given to her, and wherein she acted a Part of impregnable Chastity, she bespoke the Favour of the Ladies, by a Protestation, that in Honour of their Goodness and Virtue, she would dedicate her unblemish'd Life to their Example. Part of this Vestal Vow, I remember, was contain'd in the following Verse.

*Study to live the Character I play.*

But alas ! how weak are the strongest Works of Art, when Nature besieges it ! for tho' this good Creature so far held out her Distaste to Mankind, that they could never reduce her to marry any one of 'em ; yet we must own she grew, like *Cæsar*, greater by her Fall ! Her first heroick Motive, to a Surrender, was to save the Life of a Lover, who, in his Despair, had vow'd to destroy himself. with which Act of Mercy (in a jealous Dispute once in my hearing) she



## 82 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

she was provok'd to reproach him in these very Words ; *Villain ! did I not save your Life ?* The generous Lover, in return to that first tender Obligation, gave Life to her first-born, and that pious Offspring has, since, rais'd to her Memory, several innocent Grand-children.

So that, as we see, it is not the Hood, that makes the Monk, nor the Veil the Vestal ; I am apt to think, that if the Personal Morals of an Actor, were to be weighed by his Appearance on the Stage, the Advantage and Favour (if any were due to either side) might rather incline to the Traitor, than the Hero, to the *Sempronius*, than the *Cato* ; or to the *Syphax*, than the *Juba* : Because no Man can naturally desire to cover his Honesty with a wicked Appearance ; but an ill Man might possibly incline to cover his Guilt with the appearance of Virtue, which was the Case of the frail Fair One, now mentioned. But be this Question decided as it may, *Sandford* always appeared to me the honestest Man, in proportion to the Spirit wherewith he expos'd the wicked and immoral Characters he acted : For had his Heart been unsound, or tainted with the least Guilt of them, his Conscience must in spite of him, in any too near a Resemblance of himself, have been a Check upon the Vivacity of his Action. *Sandford*, therefore, might be said to have contributed his equal Share, with the foremost Actors, to the true and laudable Use of the Stage : And in this Light too, of being so frequently the Object of common Distaste, we may honestly style him a Theatrical Martyr, to Poetical Justice : For in making Vice odious, or Virtue amiable, where does the Merit differ ? To hate the one, or love the other, are but leading Steps to the same Temple of Fame, tho' at different Portals.

This Actor, in his manner of Speaking, varied very much from those I have already mentioned. His Voice had an acute and piercing Tone, which struck every Syllable of his Words distinctly upon the Ear. He had likewise a peculiar skill in his Look of marking out to an Audience whatever he judg'd worth their

more

more than ordinary Notice. When he deliver'd a Command, he would sometimes give it more Force, by seeming to slight the Ornament of Harmony. In *Dryden's* Plays of Rhime, he as little as possible glutted the Ear with the Jingle of it, rather chusing when the Sense would permit him, to lose it, thanto value it.

Had *Sandford* liv'd in *Shakespear's* Time, I am confident his Judgment must have chose him, above all other Actors, to have play'd his *Richard the Third*: I leave his Person out of the Question, which, tho' naturally made for it, yet that would have been the least part of his Recommendation: *Sandford* had stronger Claims to it; he had sometimes an uncouth Stateliness in his Motion, a harsh and sullen Pride of Speech, a meditating Brow, a stern Aspect, occasionally changing into an almost ludicrous Triumph over all Goodness and Virtue: From thence falling into the most asswasive Gentleness, and soothing Candour of a designing Heart. These, I say, must have preferr'd him to it; these would have been Colours so essentially shining in that Character, that it will be no Dispraise to that great Author, to say, *Sandford* must have shewn as many masterly Strokes in it (had he ever acted it) as are visible in the Writing it.

When I first brought *Richard the Third* (with such Alterations as I thought not improper) to the Stage, *Sandford* was engag'd in the Company then acting under King *William's* Licence in *Lincoln's-Inn Fields*; otherwise you cannot but suppose my Interest must have offer'd him that Part. What encourag'd me, therefore, to attempt it myself at the *Theatre-Royal*, was, that I imagin'd I knew how *Sandford* would have spoken every Line of it: If therefore, in any Part of it, I succeeded, let the Merit be given to him: And how far I succeeded in that Light, those only can be Judges who remember him. In order, therefore, to give you a nearer Idea of *Sandford*, you must give me leave (compell'd as I am to be vain) to tell you, that the late Sir *John Vanburgh*, who was  
an

## 84 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

an Admirer of *Sandford*, after he had seen me act it, assur'd me, That he never knew any one Actor so particularly profit by another, as I had done by *Sandford* in *Richard the Third*: You have, said he, his very Look, Gesture, Gait, Speech, and every Motion of him, and have borrow'd them all, only to serve you in that Character. If therefore Sir *John Vanburgh's* Observation was just, they who remember me in *Richard the Third*, may have a nearer Conception of *Sandford*, than from all the critical account I can give of him.

I come now to those other Men Actors, who, at this time, were equally famous in the lower Life of Comedy. But I find my self more at a loss to give you them, in their true and proper Light, than those I have already set before you. Why the Tragedian warms us into Joy, or Admiration, or sets our Eyes on flow with Pity, we can easily explain to another's Apprehension: But it may sometimes puzzle the gravest Spectator to account for that familiar Violence of Laughter, that shall seize him, at some particular Strokes of a true Comedian. How then shall I describe what a better Judge might not be able to express? The Rules to please the Fancy cannot so easily be laid down, as those that ought to govern the Judgment. The Decency too that must be observ'd in Tragedy, reduces, by the manner of speaking it, one Actor to be much more like another, than they can or need be suppos'd to be in Comedy: There the Laws of Action give them such free, and almost unlimited Liberties, to play and wanton with Nature, that the Voice, Look, and Gesture of a Comedian may be as various, as the Manners and Faces of the whole Mankind are different from one another. These are the Difficulties I lie under. Where I want Words, therefore, to describe what I may commend, I can only hope you will give credit to my Opinion: And this Credit I shall most stand in need of, when I tell you, that

*Nemo*

*Nokes* was an Actor of a quite different Genius from any I have ever read, heard of, or seen, since or before his Time; and yet his general Excellence may be comprehended in one Article, *viz.* a plain and palpable Simplicity of Nature, which was so utterly his own, that he was often as unaccountably diverting in his common Speech, as on the Stage. I saw him once, giving an account of some Table talk, to another Actor behind the Scenes, which, a Man of Quality accidentally listening to, was so deceiv'd by his Manner, that he ask'd him, if that was a new Play, he was rehearsing? It seems almost amazing, that this Simplicity, so easy to *Nokes*, should never be caught by any one of his Successors. *Leigh* and *Underhill* have been well copied, though not equal'd by others. But not all the mimical Skill of *Escount* (fam'd as he was for it) though he had often seen *Nokes*, could scarce give us an Idea of him. After this, perhaps it will be saying less of him, when I own, that though I have still the Sound of every Line he spoke, in my Ear, (which us'd not to be thought a bad one) yet I have often try'd, by my self, but in vain, to reach the least distant Likeness of the *Vis Comica* of *Nokes*. Though this may seem little to his Praise, it may be negatively saying a good deal to it, because I have never seen any one Actor, except himself, whom I could not, at least, so far imitate, as to give you a more than tolerable Notion of his Manner. But *Nokes* was so singular a Species, and was so form'd by Nature, for the Stage, that I question if (beyond the trouble of getting Words by Heart) it ever cost him an Hour's Labour to arrive at that high Reputation he had, and deserved.

The Characters he particularly shone in, were *Sir Martin Marr-all*, *Gomez* in the *Spanish Friar*, *Sir Nicholas Gully* in *Love in a Tub*, *Barnaby Rattle* in the *Wanton Wife*, *Sir Davy Dunc* in the *Soldier's Fortune*, *Sofia* in *Amphytrion*, &c. &c. &c. To tell you how he acted them, is beyond the reach of Criticism: But, to tell you what Effect his action had upon the Spectator, is not impossible: This then is all you will

will expect from me, and from hence I must leave you to guess at him.

He scarce ever made his first Entrance in a Play, but he was received with an involuntary applause, not of Hands only, for those may be, and have often been partially prostituted, and bespoken; but by a General Laughter, which the very Sight of him provok'd, and Nature cou'd not resist; yet the louder the Laugh, the graver was his Look upon it; and sure, the ridiculous Solemnity of his Features were enough to have set a whole Bench of Bishops into a Titter, cou'd he have been honour'd (may it be no Offence to suppose it) with such grave, and right reverend Auditors. In the ludicrous Distresses, which by the Laws of Comedy, Folly is often involv'd in; he sunk into such a mixture of piteous Puillaninity, and a Consternation so ruefully ridiculous and inconsolable, that when he had shook you, to a Fatigue of Laughter, it became a moot point, whether you ought not to have pity'd him. When he debated any matter by himself, he would shut up his Mouth with a dumb studious pout, and roll his full Eye, into such a vacant Amazement, such a palpable Ignorance of what to think of it, that his silent Perplexity (which would sometimes hold him several Minutes) gave your Imagination as full Content, as the most absurd thing he could say upon it. In the Character of Sir *Martin Marr-all*, who is always committing Blunders to the prejudice of his own Interest, when he had brought himself to a Dilemma in his affairs, by vainly proceeding upon his own Head, and was, afterwards afraid to look his governing Servant, and Counsellor in the Face; what a copious, and distressful Harangue have I seen him make, with his Looks (while the House has been in one continued Roar, for several Minutes) before he could prevail with his Courage to speak a Word to him! Then might you have, at once, read in his Face *Vexation*—that his own Measures, which he had piqued himself upon, had fail'd. *Envy*—of his Servant's superior Wit—*Distress*—to retrieve, the Occasion he had lost.

*Shame*



*Shame*—to confess his Folly ; and yet a fullen Desire, to be reconcil'd, and better advis'd, for the future ! What Tragedy ever shew'd us such a Tumult of Passions, rising, at once, in one Bosom ! or what buskin'd Hero standing under the Load of them, could have more effectually, mov'd his Spectators, by the most pathetick Speech, than poor miserable *Nokes* did, by this silent Eloquence, and piteous Plight of his Features ?

His Person was of the middle size, his Voice clear, and audible ; his natural Countenance grave, and sober ; but the Moment he spoke, the settled Seriousness of his Features was utterly discharg'd, and a dry, drolling, or laughing Levity took such full Possession of him, that I can only refer the Idea of him to your Imagination. In some of his low Characters, that became it, he had a shuffling Shamble in his Gait, with so contented an Ignorance in his aspect, and an awkward absurdity in his Gesture, that had you not known him, you could not have believ'd, that naturally he could have had a Grain of common Sense. In a Word, I am tempted to sum up the Character of *Nokes*, as a Comedian, in a Parodie of what *Shakespeare's* Mark Antony says of *Brutus*, as a Hero.

*His Life was Laughter, and the Ludicrous  
So mixt, in him, that Nature might stand up,  
And say to all the World—This was an Actor.*

*Leigh* was of the mercurial kind, and though not so strict an Observer of Nature, yet never so wanton in his performance, as to be wholly out of her Sight. In Humour, he lov'd to take a full Career, but was careful enough to stop short, when just upon the Precipice : he had great Variety, in his manner, and was famous in very different Characters : In the canting, grave Hypocrisy of the *Spanish* Friar, he stretcht the Veil of Piety so thinly over him, that in every Look, Word, and Motion, you saw a palpable, wicked Slyness shine through it—Here he kept his Vivacity demurely confin'd, till the pretended Duty of his Function

88 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

tion demanded it; and then he exerted it, with a cholerick sacerdotal Insolence. But the Friar is a Character of such glaring Vice, and so strongly drawn, that a very indifferent Actor cannot but hit upon the broad Jest, that are remarkable, in every Scene of it. Though I have never yet seen any one, that has fill'd them with half the Truth, and Spirit of *Leigh* — *Leigh* rais'd the Character as much above the Poet's Imagination, as the Character has sometimes rais'd other Actors above themselves; and I do not doubt, but the Poet's Knowledge of *Leigh*'s Genius help'd him to many a pleasant Stroke of Nature, which without that Knowledge never might have enter'd into his Conception. *Leigh* was so eminent in this Character, that the late Earl of *Dorset* (who was equally an Admirer, and a Judge of Theatrical Merit, had a whole Length of him, in the Friar's Habit, drawn by *Kneller*: The whole Portrait is highly painted, and extremely like him. But no wonder *Leigh* arriv'd to such Fame, in what was so completely written for him; when Characters that would made the Reader yawn, in the Closet, have by the Strength of his action, been lifted into the lowest Laughter on the Stage. Of this kind was the Scrivener's great boobily Son in the *Villain*; *Ralph*, a stupid, staring, Under-servant, in *Sir Solomon Single*. Quite opposite to those were *Sir Jolly Fumble*, in the *Soldier's Fortune*, and his old *Belfond* in the *Squire of Alsatia*. In *Sir Jolly* he was all Life, and laughing Humour; and when *Nokes* acted with him in the same Play, they return'd the Ball so dexterously upon one another, that every Scene between them, seem'd but one continued Rest of Excellence — But alas! when those Actors were gone, that Comedy, and many others, for the same Reason, were rarely known to stand upon their own Legs; by seeing no more of *Leigh* or *Nokes* in them, the Characters were quite sunk, and alter'd. In his *Sir William Belfond*, *Leigh* shew'd a more spirited Variety, than ever I saw, any Actor, in any one Character come up to: The Poet, 'tis true, had here, exactly chalk'd for him,

him, the Out-lines of Nature ; but the high Colouring the strong Lights and shades of Humour, that enliven'd the whole, and struck our Admiration, with Surprise and Delight, were wholly owing to the Author. The early Reader might, perhaps, have been pleas'd with the Author without discerning a Feature ; but the Spectator must have heartily held his sides, or the Actor would have heartily made them ache for it.

Now, though I observ'd before, that *Nokes* never was tolerably touch'd by any of his Successors ; yet, in this Character, I must own, I have seen *Leigh* extremely well imitated, by my late facetious Friend *Penkethman*, who though far short of what was inimitable, in the Original, yet as to the general Resemblance, was a very valuable Copy of him : and, as I know *Penkethman* cannot yet be out of your Memory, I have chose to mention him here, to give you the nearest Idea I can, of the Excellence of *Leigh* in that particular Light : For *Leigh* had many masterly Variations, which the other cou'd not, nor ever pretended to reach ; particularly in the Dotage, and Follies of extreme old Age, in the Characters of *Fumble* in the *Fond Husband*, and the Toothless Lawyer, in the *City Politicks* ; both which Plays liv'd only by the extraordinary Performance of *Nokes* and *Leigh*.

There were two other Characters, of the farcical kind, — *Geta* in the *Prophets*, and *Crack* in *Sir Courtly Nice*, which as they are less confin'd to Nature, the Imitation of them was less difficult to *Penkethman* ; who, to say the Truth, delighted more in the whimsical, than the natural ; therefore, when I say he sometimes resembled *Leigh*, I reserve this Distinction, on his Master's side ; that the pleasant Extravagancies of *Leigh* were all the Flowers of his own Fancy, while the less fertile Brain of my Friend was contented to make use of the Stock his Predecessor had left him. What I have said, therefore, is not to detract from honest *Pinky's* Merit, but to do Justice to his Predecessor — And though, 'tis true, we as seldom see a good Actor, as a great Poet arise from the bare Imitation of another's

other's Genius; yet, if this be a general Rule *Penkethman* was the nearest to an Exception from it; for with those, who never knew *Leigh*, he might very well have pass'd for a more than common Original. Yet again, as my Partiality for *Penkethman* ought not to lead me from Truth, I must beg leave (though out of its Place) to tell you fairly what was the best of him, that the Superiority of *Leigh* may stand in its due Light — *Penkethman* had certainly, from Nature, a great deal of comic Power about him; but his Judgment was, by no means equal to it; for he would make frequent Deviations into the Whimsies of an *Harlequin*. By the way, (let me digress a little farther) whatever Allowances are made for the License of that Character, I mean of an *Harlequin*, whatever Pretences may be urg'd, from the Practice of the ancient Comedy, for its being play'd in a Mask, resembling no part of the human Species; I am apt to think, the best Excuse a modern Actor can plead for his continuing it, is that the low, senseless, and monstrous things he says, and does in it, no theatrical Assurance could get through, with a bare Face: Let me give you an Instance of even *Penkethman's* being out of Countenance for want of it: When he first play'd *Harlequin* in the *Emperor of the Moon*, several Gentlemen (who inadvertently judg'd by the Rules of Nature) fancy'd that a great deal of the Drollery, and Spirit of his Grimace was lost, by his wearing that useless, unmeaning Masque of a black Cat, and therefore insisted, that the next time of his acting that Part, he should play without it: Their Desire was accordingly comply'd with — but alas! in vain — *Penkethman* could not take to himself the Shame of the Character without being conceal'd — he was no more *Harlequin* — his Humour was quite disconcerted! his Conscience could not, with the same *Effronterie* declare against Nature, without the Cover of that unchanging Face, which he was sure would never blush for it! no! it was quite another Case! without that Armour his Courage could not come up to the bold Strokes, that were necessary to  
get

get the better of common Sense. Now if this Circumstance will justify the Modesty of *Penkethman*, it cannot but throw a wholesome Contempt on the low Merit of an *Harlequin*. But how farther necessary the Mask is to that Fool's Coat, we have lately had a stronger Proof, in the Favour, that the *Harlequin Sauvage* met with, at *Paris*, and the ill Fate that follow'd the same *Sauvage*, when he pull'd off his Masque in *London*. So that it seems, what was Wit from an *Harlequin*, was something too extravagant from a human Creature. If therefore *Penkethman*, in Characters drawn from Nature, might sometimes launch out into a few gamesome Liberties, which would not have been excus'd from a more correct Comedian; yet, in his manner of taking them, he always seem'd to me, in a kind of Consciousness of the Hazard he was running, as if he fairly confess'd, that what he did was only, as well as he *could* do—That he was willing to take his Chance for Success, but if he did not meet with it, a Rebuke should break no Squares; he would mend it another time, and would take whatever pleas'd his Judges to think of him, in good part; and I have often thought, that a good deal of the Favour he met with, was owing to this seeming humble way of waving all Pretences to Merit, but what the Town would please to allow him. What confirms me in this Opinion is, that when it has been his ill Fortune to meet with a *Disgraccia*, I have known him say apart to himself, yet loud enough to be heard—*Odso!* I believe I *am* a little wrong here! which once was so well receiv'd, by the Audience, that they turn'd their Reproof into applause.

Now, the Judgment of *Leigh* always guarded the happier Sallies of his Fancy, from the least Hazard of Disapprobation: he seem'd not to court, but to attack your applause, and always came off victorious; nor did his highest assurance amount to any more, than that just Confidence, without which the commendable Spirit of every good Actor must be abated; and of this Spirit *Leigh* was a most perfect Master. He was much admir'd by King *Charles*, who us'd to distinguish him,



92 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

him, when spoke of, by the Title of *his Actor* : Which however makes me imagine, that in his Exile that Prince might have receiv'd his first Impression of good Actors from the *French Stage* ; for *Leigh* had more of that farcical Vivacity than *Nokes* ; but *Nokes* was never languid by his more strict adherence to Nature, and as far as my Judgment is worth taking, if their intrinsic Merit could be justly weigh'd, *Nokes* must have had the better in the Balance. Upon the unfortunate Death of *Monfort*, *Leigh* fell ill of a Fever, and dy'd in a Week after him, in *December*, 1692.

*Underhill* was a correct, and natural Comedian, his particular Excellence was in Characters, that may be called Still-life, I mean the stiff, the heavy, and the stupid ; to these he gave the exactest, and most expressive Colours, and in some of them, look'd, as if it were not in the Power of human Passions to alter a Feature of him. In the solemn Formality of *Obadiab* in the *Committee*, and in the boobily heaviness of *Lolpoop* in the *Squire of Alsatia*, he seem'd the immovable Log he stood for ! a Countenance of Wood could not be more fixt than his, when the Blockhead of a Character required it : His Face was full and long ; from his Crown to the end of his Nose, was the shorter half of it, so that the Disproportion of his lower Features, when soberly compos'd, with an unwandering Eye hanging over them, threw him into the most lumpish, moping Mortal, that ever made Beholders merry ! not but, at other times, he could be weakened into Spirit equally ridiculous — In the coarse, rustick Humour of Justice *Clodpate*, in *Epsome Wells*, he was a delightful Brute ! and in the blunt Vivacity of Sir *Sampson*, in *Love for Love*, he shew'd all that true perverse Spirit, that is commonly seen in much Wit, and ill Nature. This Character is one of those few so well written, with so much Wit and Humour, that an Actor must be the grossest Dunce, that does not appear with an unusual Life in it : But it will still shew as great a Proportion of Skill, to come near *Underhill* in the acting it, which (not to undervalue those who soon

came

came after him) I have not yet seen. He was particularly admir'd too, for the Grave-digger in *Hamlet*. The Author of the *Tatler* recommends him to the Favour of the Town, upon that Play's being acted for his Benefit, wherein, after his Age had some Years oblig'd him to leave the Stage, he came on again, for that Day, to perform his old Part; but, alas! so worn, and disabled, as if himself was to have lain in the Grave he was digging; when he could no more excite Laughter, his Infirmities were dismiss'd with Life: He dy'd soon after, a super-annuated Pensioner, in the List of those who, were supported by the joint Sharers, under the first Patent granted to Sir *Richard Steele*.

The deep Impressions of these excellent Actors, which I receiv'd in my Yonth, I am afraid, may have drawn me into the common Foible of us old Fellows; which is, Fondness, and perhaps, a tedious Partiality for the Pleasures we have formerly tasted, and think are now fallen off, because we can no longer enjoy them. If therefore I lie under that Suspicion, though I have related nothing incredible, or out of the reach of a good Judge's Conception, I must appeal to those Few, who are about my own Age, for the Truth and Likeness of these Theatrical Portraits.

There were, at this time, several others in some degree of Favour with the Publick, *Powell*, *Verbruggen*, *Williams*, &c. But as I cannot think their best Improvements made them, in any wise, equal to those I have spoke of, I ought not to range them in the same Class. Neither were *Wilks*, or *Dogget*, yet come to the Stage; nor was *Booth* initiated till about six Years after them; or Mrs. *Oldfield* known, till the Year 1700. I must therefore reserve the four last for their proper Period, and proceed to the Actresses, that were famous with *Betterton*, at the latter end of the last Century.

Mrs. *Barry* was then in possession of almost all the chief Parts in Tragedy: With what Skill she gave  
Life

94 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

Life to them, you will judge from the Words of *Dryden*, in his Preface to *Cleomenes*, where he says,

*Mrs. Barry, always excellent, has in this Tragedy excell'd her self, and gain'd a Reputation, beyond any Woman I have ever seen on the Theatre.*

I very perfectly remember her acting that Part ; and however unnecessary it may seem, to give my Judgment after *Dryden's*, I cannot help saying, I do not only close with his Opinion, but will venture to add, that (tho' *Dryden* has been dead these Thirty Eight Years) the same Compliment, to this Hour, may be due to her Excellence. And tho' she was then, not a little, past her Youth, she was not, till that time, fully arriv'd to her Maturity of Power and Judgment : From whence I would observe, That the short Life of Beauty, is not long enough to form a complete Actress. In Men, the Delicacy of Person is not so absolutely necessary, nor the Decline of it so soon taken notice of. The Fame *Mrs. Barry* arriv'd to, is a particular Proof of the Difficulty there is, in judging with Certainty, from their first Trials, whether young People will ever make any great Figure on a Theatre. There was, it seems, so little Hope of *Mrs. Barry*, at her first setting out, that she was, at the end of the first Year, discharg'd the Company, among others, that were thought to be a useless Expence to it. I take it for granted that the Objection to *Mrs. Barry*, at that time, must have been a defective Ear, or some unskilful Dissonance, in her manner of pronouncing : But where there is a proper Voice, and person, with the addition of a good Understanding, Experience tells us, that such Defect is not always invincible ; of which, not only *Mrs. Barry*, but the late *Mrs. Oldfield*, are eminent Instances. *Mrs. Oldfield* had been a Year, in the Theatre-Royal, before she was observ'd to give any tolerable Hope of her being an Actress ; so unlike, to all manner of Propriety, was her Speaking ! How unaccountably, then, does a Genius for the

Stage

Stage make its way towards Perfection? For, notwithstanding these equal Disadvantages, both these actresses, tho' of different Excellence, made themselves complete Mistresses of their Art, by the Prevalence of their Understanding. If this Observation may be of any use, to the Masters of future Theatres, I shall not then have made it to no purpose.

Mrs. *Barry*, in Characters of Greatness, had a presence of elevated Dignity, her Mein and Motion superb, and gracefully majestic; her Voice full, clear, and strong, so that no Violence of Passion could be too much for her: and when Distress, or Tenderness possess'd her, she subsided into the most affecting Melody, and Softness. In the Art of exciting pity, she had a Power beyond all the Actresses I have yet seen, or what your Imagination can conceive. Of the former of these two great Excellencies, she gave the most delightful Proofs in almost all the Heroic Plays of *Dryden* and *Lee*; and of the latter, in the softer Passions of *Otway's Monimia* and *Belvidera*. In Scenes of anger, Defiance, or Resentment, while she was impetuous, and terrible, she pour'd out the Sentiment with an enchanting Harmony, and it was this particular Excellence, for which *Dryden* made her the above-recited Compliment, upon her acting *Cassandra* in his *Cleomenes*. But here, I am apt to think his Partiality for that Character, may have tempted his Judgment to let it pass for her Master-piece; when he could not but know, there were several other Characters in which her action might have given her a fairer Pre-  
tence to the Praise he has bestow'd on her, for *Cassandra*; for, in no part of that, is there the least ground for Compassion, as in *Monimia*; nor equal cause for Admiration, as in the nobler Love of *Cleopatra*, or the tempestuous Jealousy of *Roxana*. 'Twas in these Lights, I thought Mrs. *Barry* shone with a much brighter Excellence than in *Cassandra*. She was the first Person whose Merit was distinguish'd, by the Indulgence of having an annual Benefit Play, which was granted to her alone, if I mistake not, first in King  
James's

*James's* time, and which became not common to others, 'till the Division of this Company, after the Death of King *William's* Queen *Mary*. This great Actress dy'd of a Fever, towards the latter end of Queen *Anne*; the Year I have forgot; but perhaps you will recollect it, by an Expression that fell from her in blank Verse, in her last Hours, when she was delirious, viz.

*Ha, ha! and so they make us Lords, by Dozens!*

Mrs. *Betterton*, tho' far advanc'd in Years, was so great a Mistress of Nature, that even Mrs. *Barry*, who acted the Lady *Mackbeth* after her, could not in that part, with all her superior Strength, and Melody of Voice, throw out those quick and careless Strokes of Terror, from the Disorder of a guilty Mind, which the other gave us, with a Facility in her Manner, that render'd them at once tremendous, and delightful. Time could not impair her Skill, tho' he had brought her Person to decay. She was, to the last, the Admiration of all true Judges of Nature, and Lovers of *Shakespeare*, in whose Plays she chiefly excell'd, and without a Rival. When she quitted the Stage, several good Actresses were the better for her Instruction. She was a Woman of an unblemish'd, and sober Life; and had the Honour to teach Queen *Anne*, when Princess, the Part of *Semandra* in *Mitbridates*, which she acted at Court in King *Charles's* time. After the Death of Mr. *Betterton*, her Husband, that Princess, when Queen, order'd her a Pension for Life, but she liv'd not to receive more than the first half Year of it.

Mrs. *Leigh*, the Wife of *Leigh* already mention'd, had a very droll way of dressing the pretty Foibles of superannuated Beauties. She had, in herself, a good deal of Humour, and knew how to infuse it into the affected Mothers, Aunts, and modest stale Maids, that had miss'd their Market; of this sort were the Modish Mother in the *Chances*, affecting to be politely com-mo-de, for her own Daughter; the coquette Prede of an Aunt, in *Sir Courthly Nice*, who prides herself in being chaste, and cruel, at Fifty; and the languishing Lady



Lady *Wishfort*, in *The Way of the World*: In all these, with many others, she was extremely entertaining, and painted, in a lively manner, the blind Side of Nature.

Mrs. *Butler*, who had her Christian Name of *Charlotte* given her by King *Charles*, was the Daughter of a decay'd Knight, and had the Honour of that Prince's Recommendation to the Theatre; a provident Restitution, given to the Stage in kind, what he had sometimes taken from it: The Publick, at least, was oblig'd by it; for she prov'd not only a good Actress, but was allow'd, in those Days, to sing and dance to great Perfection. In the Dramatick Opera's of *Dioclesian*, and that of *King Arthur*, she was a capital, and admired Performer. In speaking too, she had a sweet-ton'd Voice, which, with her naturally genteel Air, and sensible Pronunciation, render'd her wholly Mistress of the amiable, in many serious Characters. In Parts of Humour too she had a manner of blending her assuasive Softness, even with the Gay, the Lively, and the Alluring. Of this she gave an agreeable Instance, in her action of the (*Villiers*) Duke of *Buckingham's* second *Constantia* in the *Chances*. In which, if I should say, I have never seen her exceeded, I might still do no wrong to the late Mrs. *Oldfield's* lively Performance of the same Character. Mrs. *Oldfield's* Fame may spare Mrs. *Butler's* Addition this Compliment, without the least Diminution, or Dispute of her Superiority, in Characters of more moment.

Here I cannot help observing, when there was but one Theatre in *London*, at what unequal Salaries, compar'd to those of later Days, the hired Actors were then held, by the absolute Authority of their frugal Masters, the Patentees; for Mrs. *Butler* had then but Forty Shillings a Week, and could she have obtain'd an addition of Ten Shillings more (which was refus'd her) would never have left their Service; but being offer'd her own Conditions, to go with Mr. *Ashbury* to *Dublin* (who was then raising a Company of Actors for that Theatre, where there had been none since the Revolu-

tion) her Discontent, here, prevail'd with her to accept of his offer, and he found his account in her Value. Were not those Patentees most sagacious Oeconomists, that could lay hold on so notable an Expedient, to lessen their Charge? How gladly, in my Time of being a Sharer, would we have given four times her Income, to an actress of equal Merit?

Mrs. *Monfort*, whose second Marriage gave her the Name of *Verbruggen*, was Mistress of more variety of Humour, than I ever knew in any one Woman Actress. This variety too was attended with an equal Vivacity, which made her excellent in Characters extremely different. As she was naturally a pleasant Mimick, she had the Skill to make that Talent useful on the Stage, a Talent which may be surprising in a Conversation, and yet be lost when brought to the Theatre, which was the Case of *Escourt* already mention'd: But where the Elocution is round, distinct, voluble, and various, as Mrs. *Monfort's* was, the Mimick, there, is a great assistant to the Actor. Nothing, tho' ever so barren, if within the Bounds of Nature, could be flat in her Hands. She gave many heightening Touches to Characters but coldly written, and often made an Author vain of his Work, that in it self had but little Merit. She was so fond of Humour, in what low Part soever to be found, that she would make no scruple of defacing her fair Form, to come heartily into it; for when she was eminent in several desirable Characters of Wit, and Humour, in higher Life, she would be, in as much Fancy, when descending into the antiquated *Abigail*, of *Fletcher*, as when triumphing in all the Airs and vain Graces of a fine Lady; a Merit, that few Actresses care for. In a Play of *D'urfey's*, now forgotten, call'd, *The Western Lass*, which Part she acted, she transform'd her whole Being, Body, Shape, Voice, Language, Look, and Features, into almost another Animal; with a strong *Devonshire* Dialect, a broad laughing Voice, a poking Head, round Shoulders, an unconceiving Eye, and the most be-diz'ning, dowdy Dress, that ever covered the untrain'd Limbs of a *Joan Trot*. To have seen  
her

her here, you would have thought it impossible the same Creature could ever have been recovered, to what was as easy to her, the Gay, the Lively, and the Desirable. Nor was her Humour limited, to her Sex ; for, while her Shape permitted, she was a more adroit pretty Fellow, than is usually seen upon the Stage : Her easy Air, Action, Mien, and Gesture, quite chang'd from the Quois, to the cock'd Hat, and Cavalier in fashion. People were were so fond of seeing her a Man, that when the Part of *Bays* in the *Rehearsal*, had, for some time, lain dormant, she was desired to take it up, which I have seen her act with all the true coxcomby Spirit, and Humour, that the Sufficiency of the Character required.

But what found most Employment for her whole various Excellence at once, was the Part of *Melantha*, in *Marriage-À-la-mode*. *Melantha* is as finish'd an Imperitent, as ever flutter'd in a Drawing-Room, and seems to contain the most compleat System of Female Poppery, that could possibly be crowded into the tortur'd Form of a Fine Lady. Her Language, Dress, Motion, Manners, Soul, and Body, are in a continual Hurry to be something more, than is necessary, or commendable. And tho' I doubt it will be a vain Labour, to offer you a just Likeness of Mrs. *Monfort's* Action, yet the fantastick Impression is still so strong in my Memory, that I cannot help saying something, tho' fantastically, about it. The first ridiculous Airs that break from her, are, upon a Gallant, never seen before, who delivers her a Letter from her Father, recommending him to her good Graces, as an honourable Lover. Here now, one would think she might naturally shew a little of the Sex's decent Reserve, though never so slightly cover'd ! No, Sir ; not a Title of it ; Modesty is the Virtue of a poor-soul'd Country Gentlewoman ; she is too much a Court Lady, to be under so vulgar a Confusion ; she reads the Letter, therefore, with a careless dropping Lip, and an erected Brow, humming it hastily over, as if she were impatient to out-go her Father's Commands, by making a complete Conquest of him at once ; and, that the Let-

ter might not embarrass her Attack, crack ! she crumbles it at once, into her Palm, and pours upon him her whole Artillery of Airs, Eyes, and Motion ; down goes her dainty, diving Body, to the Ground, as if she were sinking under the conscious Load of her own Attractions ; then launches into a Flood of Fine Language, and Compliment, still playing her Chest forward in fifty Falls and Risings, like a Swan upon waving Water ; and, to complete her Impertinence, she is so rapidly fond of her own Wit, that she will not give her Lover leave to praise it : Silent assenting Hows, and vain Endeavours to speak, are all the share of the Conversation he is admitted to, which, at last, he is reliev'd from, by her Engagement to half a Score Visits, which she *swims* from him to make, with a Promise to return in a Twinkling.

If this Sketch has Colour enough to give you any near Conception of her, I then need only tell you, that throughout the whole Character, her variety of Humour was every way proportionable ; as indeed, in most Parts, that she thought worth her care, or that had the least Matter for her Fancy to work upon, I may justly say, That no Actress, from her own Conception, could have heighten'd them with more lively Strokes of Nature.

I come now to the last, and only living Person, of all those whose Theatrical Characters I have promis'd you, Mrs. *Bracegirdle* ; who, I know, would rather pass her remaining Days forgotten, as an Actress, than to have her Youth recollected in the most favourable Light I am able to place it ; yet, as she is essentially necessary to my Theatrical History, and, as I only bring her back to the Company of those, with whom she pass'd the Spring and Summer of her Life, I hope it will excuse the Liberty I take, in commemorating the Delight which the Publick received from her Appearance, while she was an Ornament to the Theatre.

Mrs. *Bracegirdle* was now, but just blooming to her Maturity ; her Reputation, as an Actress, gradually rising with that of her Person ; never any Woman was  
in

in such general Favour of her Spectators, which, to the last Scene of her dramatick Life, she maintain'd, by not being unguarded in her private Character. This Discretion contributed, not a little, to make her the *Cara*, the Darling of the Theatre: For it will be no extravagant thing to say, scarce an Audience saw her, that were less than half of them Lovers, without a suspected Favourite among them: And tho' she might be said to have been the Universal Passion, and under the highest Temptations; her Constancy in resisting them, serv'd but to increase the number of her Admirers: And this perhaps you will more easily believe, when I extend not my Encomiums on her Person, beyond a Sincerity that can be suspected; for she had no greater Claim to Beauty, than what the most desirable *Brunette* might pretend to. But her Youth, and lively Aspect, threw out such a Glow of Health, and Chearfulness, that, on the Stage, few Spectators that were not past it, could behold her without Desire. It was even a Fashion among the Gay, and Young, to have a Taste or *Tendre* for Mrs. *Bracegirdle*. She inspired the best Authors to write for her, and two of them, when they gave her a Lover, in a Play, seem'd palpably to plead their own Passions, and make their private Court to her, in fictitious Characters. In all the chief Parts she acted, the Desirable was so predominant, that no Judge could be cold enough to consider, from what other particular Excellence she became delightful. To speak critically of an Actress, that was extremely good, were as hazardous, as to be positive in one's Opinion of the best Opera Singer. People often Judge by Comparison, where there is no Smilitude, in the Performance. So that, in this Case, we have only Taste to appeal to, and of Taste there can be no disputing. I shall therefore only say of Mrs. *Bracegirdle*, That the most eminent Authors always chose her for their favourite Character, and shall leave that uncontestable Proof of her Merit to its own Value. Yet let me say, there were two very different Characters, in which she acquitted herself with uncommon



men applause: If any thing could excuse that desperate Extravagance of Love, that almost frantick Passion of *Lee's Alexander the Great*, it must have been, when Mrs. *Bracegirdle* was his *Statira*: As when she acted *Millamant*, all the Faults, Follies, and Affectation of that agreeable Tyrant, were venially melted down into so many Charms and Attractions of a conscious Beauty. In other Characters, where Singing was a necessary Part of them, her Voice and Action gave a Pleasure, which good Sense, in those Days was not asham'd to give Praise to.

She retir'd from the Stage in the Height of her Favour from the Publick, when most of her Contemporaries, whom she had been bred up with, were declining, in the Year 1710, nor could she be persuaded to return to it, under new Masters, upon the most advantageous Terms, that were offer'd her; excepting one Day, about a Year after, to assist her good Friend, Mr. *Betterton*, when she play'd *Angelica*, in *Love for Love*, for his Benefit. She has still the Happiness to retain her usual Chearfulness, and to be, without the transitory Charm of Youth, agreeable.

If, in my account of these memorable Actors, I have not deviated from Truth, which, in the least Article I am not conscious of, may we not venture to say, they had not their Equals, at any one Time, upon any one Theatre in *Europe*? Or, if we confine the Comparison, to that of *France* alone, I believe no other Stage can be much disparag'd, by being left out of the Question; which cannot properly be decided, by the single Merit of any one Actor; whether *their Baron*, or our *Betterton*, might be the Superior, (take which Side you please) that Point reaches, either way, but to a thirteenth part of what I contend for, *viz.* That no Stage, at any one Period, could shew thirteen Actors, standing all in equal Lights of Excellence, in their Profession: And I am the bolder, in this Challenge, to any other Nation, because no Theatre having so extended a variety of natural Characters, as the *English*, can have a Demand for Actors of such various Capacities; why then, where they could

could not be equally wanted, should we suppose them, at any one time, to have existed?

How imperfect soever this copious Account of them may be, I am not without Hope, at least, it may in some degree shew, what Talents are requisite to make Actors valuable: And if that may any ways inform, or assist the Judgment of future Spectators, it may, as often, be of service to their publick Entertainments; for as their Hearers are, so will Actors be; worse or better, as the false, or true Taste applauds, or discommends them. Hence only can our Theatres improve, or must degenerate.

There is another Point, relating to the hard Condition of those who write for the Stage, which I would recommend to the Consideration of their Hearers; which is, that the extreme Severity with which they damn a bad Play, seems too terrible a Warning to those whose untried Genius might hereafter give them a good one: Whereas it might be a Temptation, to a latent Author, to make the Experiment, could he be sure that, though not approved, his Muse might, at least, be dismiss'd with Decency: But the Vivacity of our modern Criticks is of late grown so riotous, that an unsuccessful Author has no more Mercy shewn him, than a notorious Cheat, in a Pillory; every Fool, the lowest Member of the Mob, becomes a Wit, and will have a sling at him. They come now to a new Play, like Hounds to a Carcass, and are all in a full Cry, sometimes for an Hour together, before the Curtain rises to throw it amongst them. Sure, those Gentlemen cannot but allow, that a Play condemn'd after a fair Hearing, falls with thrice the Ignominy, as when it is refus'd that common Justice.

But when their critical Interruptions grow so loud, and of so long a continuance, that the Attention of quiet People (though not so complete Criticks) is terrify'd, and the Skill of the Actors quite disconcerted by the Tumult, the Play then seems rather to fall by Assassins, than by a lawful Sentence. Is it possible that such Auditors can receive Delight, or think it any Praise to them, to prosecute so injurious,  
so

so unmanly a Treatment? And tho' perhaps the Compassionate, on the other side (who know they have as good a Right to clap, and support, as others have to catcall, damn, and destroy,) may oppose this Oppression; their Good-nature, alas! contributes little to the Redress; for in this sort of Civil War, the unhappy Author, like a good Prince, while his Subjects are at mortal Variance, is sure to be a Loser by a Victory on either Side; for still the Commonwealth, his Play, is, during the Conflict, torn to pieces. While this is the Case, while the Theatre is so turbulent a Sea, and so infested with Pirates, what a Poetical Merchant, of any Substance, will venture to trade in it? If these valiant Gentlemen pretend to be Lovers of Plays, why will they deter Gentlemen, from giving them such, as are fit for Gentlemen to see? In a Word, this new Race of Criticks seem to me, like the Lion-Whelps in the *Tower*, who are so boisterously game-some at their Meals, that they dash down the Bowls of Milk, brought for their own Breakfast.

As a good Play is certainly the most rational, and the highest Entertainment, that human Invention can produce, let that be my Apology (if I need any) for having thus freely delivered my Mind, in behalf of those Gentlemen, who, under such calamitous Hazards, may hereafter be reduc'd to write for the Stage; whose Case I shall compassionate, from the same Motive, that prevail'd on *Dido*, to assist the *Trojans* in Distress.

*Non ignara mali miseris succurrere disco.* Virg.

Or, as *Dryden* has it,

*I learn to pity Woes so like my own.*

If those particular Gentlemen have sometimes made me the humbled Object of their Wit, and Humour, their Triumph at least has done me this involuntary Service, that it has driven me a Year or two sooner into a quiet Life, than otherwise, my own want of  
Judg-

Judgment might have led me to : I left the Stage, before my Strength left me ; and tho' I came to it again, for some few Days, a Year or two after ; my Reception there not only turn'd to my Account, but seem'd a fair Invitation, that I would make my Visits more frequent : But, to give over a Winner, can be no very imprudent Resolution.

## C H A P. VI.

*The Author's first Step upon the Stage. His Discouragements. The best Actors in Europe, ill us'd. A Revolution, in their Favour. King William grants them a Licence to act in Lincoln's-In Fields. The Author's Distress, in being thought a worse Actor, than a Poet. Reduc'd to write a Part for himself. His Success. More Remarks, upon Theatrical Action. Some, upon himself.*

**H**AVING given you the State of the Theatre at my first Admission to it ; I am now drawing towards the several Revolutions it suffer'd, in my own Time. But (as you find by the setting out of my History) that I always intended my self the Hero of it, it may be necessary to let you know me, in my Obscurity, as well as in my higher Light, when I became one of the Theatrical Triumvirat.

The Patentees, who were now Masters of this united, and only Company of Comedians, seem'd to make it a Rule, that no young Persons, desirous to be Actors, should be admitted into Pay under, at least, half a Year's Probation ; wisely knowing, that how early soever they might be approv'd of, there could be no great fear of losing them, while they had, then, no other Market to go to. But, alas ! Pay was the least of my Concern ;

Concern ; the Joy, and Privilege of every Day seeing Plays, for nothing, I thought was a sufficient Consideration, for the best of my Services. So that it was no Pain to my Patience, that I waited full three Quarters of a Year, before I was taken into Salary of Ten Shillings *per Week* ; which, with the Assistance of Food, and Raiment, at my Father's House, I then thought a most plentiful Accession, and myself the happiest of Mortals.

The first Thing that enters into the Head of a young Actor, is that of being a Hero : In this Ambition I was soon snubb'd, by the Insufficiency of my Voice ; to which might be added, an uninform'd meagre Person (tho' then not ill made) with a dismal pale Complexion. Under these Disadvantages, I had but a melancholy Prospect of ever playing a Lover, with Mrs. *Bracegirdle*, which I had flatter'd my Hopes, that my Youth might one Day, have recommended me to. What was most promising in me, then, was the Aptness of my Ear ; for I was soon allow'd to speak justly, tho' what was grave and serious, did not equally become me. The first Part, therefore, in which I appear'd, with any glimpse of Success, was the Chaplain in the *Orphan of Orway*. There is in this Character (of one Scene only) a decent Pleasantry, and Sense enough to shew an Audience, whether the Actor has any himself. Here was the first Applause I ever receiv'd, which, you may be sure, made my Heart leap with a higher Joy, than may be necessary to describe ; and yet my Transport was not then half so high, as at what *Goodman* (who had now left the Stage) said of me, the next Day, in my hearing. *Goodman* often came to a Rehearsal for Amusement, and having sat out the *Orphan*, the Day before ; in a Conversation with some of the principal Actors, enquir'd what new young Fellow that was, whom he had seen in the Chaplain ? Upon which, *Monfort* reply'd, *That's he, behind you*. *Goodman* then turning about, look'd earnestly at me, and, after some Pause, clapping me on the Shoulder, rejoin'd, *If he does not make a good Actor, I'll be d—d !* The Surprise of being



being commended, by one who had been himself so eminent, on the Stage, and in so positive a manner, was more than I could support; in a Word it almost took away my Breath, and (laugh if you please) fairly drew Tears from my Eyes! And, tho' it may be as ridiculous, as incredible, to tell you what a full Vanity, and Content, at that time possess'd me, I will still make it a Question, whether *Alexander* himself, or *Charles the Twelfth* of Sweden, when at the Head of their first victorious Armies, could feel a greater Transport, in their Bosoms, than I did then in mine, when but in the Rear of this Troop of Comedians. You see, to what low Particulars I am forc'd to descend, to give you a true Resemblance of the early and lively Follies of my Mind. Let me give you another Instance, of my Discretion, more desperate, than that, of preferring the Stage, to any other Views of Life. One might think, that the Madness of breaking, from the Advice, and Care of Parents, to turn Player, could not easily be exceeded: But what think you, Sir, of ——— Matrimony? which, before I was Two-and-twenty, I actually committed, when I had but twenty Pounds a Year, which my Father had assur'd to me, and Twenty Shillings a Week from my Theatrical Labours, to maintain, as I then thought, the happiest young Couple, that ever took a Leap in the Dark! If after this, to complete my Fortune, I turn'd Poet too, this last Folly, indeed, had something a better Excuse ——— Necessity: Had it never been my Lot to have come to the Stage, 'tis probable, I might never have been inclin'd, or reduc'd to have wrote for it: But having once expos'd my Person there, I thought it could be no additional Dishonour to let my Parts, whatever they were, take their Fortune along with it ——— But, to return to the Progress I made as an Actor:

Queen *Mary* having command'd the *Double Dealer* to be acted, *Kynaston* happen'd to be so ill, that he could not hope to be able next Day to perform his Part of the Lord *Touchebood*. In this Exigence, the Author, Mr. *Congreve*, advis'd that it might be given

ven to me, if at so short a Warning I would undertake it. The Flattery of being thus distinguish'd by so celebrated an Author, and the Honour to act before a Queen, you may be sure, made me blind to whatever Difficulties might attend it. I accepted the Part, and was ready in it before I slept; next Day the Queen was present at the Play, and was receiv'd with a new Prologue from the Author, spoken by Mrs. Barry, humbly acknowledging the great Honour done to the Stage, and to his Play in particular: Two Lines of it, which though I have not since read, I still remember.

*But never were in Rome, nor Athens seen,  
So fair a Circle, or so bright a Queen.*

After the Play, Mr. Congreve made me the Compliment of saying, that I had not only answer'd, but had exceeded his Expectations, and that he would shew me, he was sincere, by his saying more of me to the Masters—He was as good as his Word, and the next Pay-day, I found my Salary, of fifteen, was then advance'd to twenty Shillings a Week. But alas! this favourable Opinion of Mr. Congreve, made no farther Impression upon the Judgment of my good Masters; it only serv'd to heighten my own Vanity; but could not recommend me to any new Trials of my Capacity; not a Step farther could I get, 'till the Company was again divided; when the Desertion of the best Actors left a clear Stage, for younger Champions to mount, and shew their best Pretensions to favour. But it is now time to enter upon those Facts, that immediately preceded this remarkable Revolution of the Theatre.

You have seen how compleat a Set of Actors were under the Government of the united Patents in 1690; if their Gains were not extraordinary, what shall we impute it to, but some extraordinary ill Management? I was then too young to be in their Secrets, and therefore can only observe upon what I saw, and have since thought visibly wrong.

Though

Though the Success of the *Prophets*, and King *Arthur* (two dramatic Opera's, in which the Patentees had embark'd all their Hopes) was, in appearance, very great, yet their whole Receipts did not so far balance their Expence, as to keep them out of a large Debt, which it was publickly known was, about this time, contracted, and which found work for the Court of Chancery for about twenty Years following, till one side of the Cause grew weary. But this was not all that was wrong; every Branch of the Theatrical Trade had been sacrific'd, to the necessary sitting out those tall Ships of Burthen, that were to bring home the *Indies*. Plays of course were neglected, Actors held cheap, and slightly dress'd, while Singers, and Dancers were better paid, and embroder'd. These Measures, of course, created Murmurings, on one side, and ill Humour and Contempt on the other. When it became necessary therefore to lessen the Charge, a Resolution was taken to begin with the Salaries of the Actors; and what seem'd to make this Resolution more necessary at this Time, was the Loss of *Nokes*, *Monsfort*, and *Leigh*, who all dy'd about the same Year: No wonder then, if when these great Pillars were at once remov'd, the Building grew weaker, and the Audiences very much abated. Now in this Distress, what more natural Remedy could be found, than to incite and encourage (tho' with some Hazard) the Industry of the surviving Actors? But the Patentees, it seems, thought the surer way was to bring down their Pay, in proportion to the Fall of their Audiences. To make this Project more feasible, they propos'd to begin at the Head of 'em, rightly judging, that if the Principals acquiesc'd, their Inferiours would murmur in vain. To bring this about with a better Grace, they under Pretence of bringing younger Actors forward, order'd several of *Betterton*'s, and Mrs. *Barry*'s chief Parts to be given to young *Powell*, and Mrs. *Bracegirdle*. In this they committed two palpable Errors; for while the best Actors are in Health, and still on the Stage, the Publick is always apt to be

out of Humour, when those of a lower Class pretend to stand in their Places; or admitting, at this time, they might have been accepted, this Project might very probably have lessen'd, but could not possibly mend an Audience; and was a sure Loss of that Time, in studying, which might have been better employ'd in giving the Auditor Variety, the only Temptation to a pall'd Appetite; and Variety is only to be given by Industry: But Industry will always be lame, when the Actor has Reason to be discontented. This the Patentees did not consider, or pretended not to value, while they thought their Power secure, and uncontrollable: But farther, their first Project did not succeed; for tho' the giddy Head of *Powell*, accepted the Parts of *Betterton*; Mrs. *Bracegirdle* had a different way of thinking, and desir'd to be excus'd, from those of Mrs. *Barry*; her good Sense was not to be misled by the insidious Favour of the Patentees; she knew the Stage was wide enough for her Success, without entering into any such rash, and invidious Competition, with Mrs. *Barry*, and therefore wholly refus'd acting any Part that properly belong'd to her. But this proceeding, however, was Warning enough to make *Betterton* be upon his Guard, and to alarm others, with Apprehensions of their own Safety, from the Design that was laid against him: *Betterton*, upon this, drew into his Party most of the valuable Actors, who to secure their Unity, enter'd with him into a sort of Association, to stand, or fall together. All this the Patentees for some time slighted, but when Matters drew towards a Crisis, they found it advisable to take the same Measures, and accordingly open'd an Association on their part; both which were severally sign'd, as the Interest or Inclination of either Side led them.

During these Contentions, which the impolitick Patentees had rais'd against themselves (not only by this I have mentioned, but by many other Grievances, which my Memory retains not) the Actors offer'd a Treaty of Peace; but their Masters imagining no Consequence could shake the Right of their Authority, refus'd all Terms of Accommodation. In the mean  
time

time this Dissention was so prejudicial to their daily Affairs, that I remember it was allow'd by both Parties, that before *Christmas*, the Patent had lost the getting of at least a thousand Pounds by it.

My having been a Witness of this unnecessary Rupture, was of great use to me, when many Years after, I came to be a Manager myself. I laid it down as a settled Maxim, that no Company could flourish while the chief Actors, and the Undertakers were at variance. I therefore made it a Point, while it was possible, upon tolerable Terms, to keep the valuable Actors in humour with their Station; and tho' I was as jealous of their Encroachments as any of my Co-partners could be, I always guarded against the least Warmth, in my Expostulations with them; not but at the same time they might see, I was perhaps more determin'd in the Question, than those that gave a loose to their Resentment, and when they were cool, were apt to recede. I do not remember that I ever made a promise to any, that I did not keep, and therefore was cautious how I made them. This Coldness, though it might not please, at least left them nothing to reproach me with; and if Temper, and fair Words could prevent a Disobligation, I was sure never to give Offence or receive it. But as I was but one of three, I could not oblige others to observe the same Conduct. However, by this means, I kept many an unreasonable Discontent, from breaking out, and both Sides found their Account in it.

How a contemptuous and overbearing manner of treating Actors had like to have ruin'd us, in our early Prosperity, shall be shewn in its Place: If future Managers should chance to think my way right, I suppose they will follow it; if not, when they find what happen'd to the Patentees (who chose to disagree with their People) perhaps they may think better of it.

The Patentees then, who by their united Powers, had made a Monopoly of the Stage, and consequently presum'd they might impose what Conditions they pleas'd upon their People, did not consider, that they



were all this while endeavouring to enslave a Set of Actors, whom the Publick (more arbitrary than themselves) were inclin'd to support; nor did they reflect, that the Spectator naturally wish'd, that the Actor, who gave him Delight, might enjoy the profits arising from his Labour, without regard of what pretended Damage, or Injustice might fall upon his Owners, whose personal Merit the publick was not so well acquainted with. From this Consideration, then, several Persons of the highest Distinction espous'd their Cause, and sometimes, in the Circle, entertain'd the King with the State of the Theatre. At length their Grievances were laid before the Earl of *Dorset*, then Lord Chamberlain, who took the most effectual Method for their Relief. The Learned of the Law were advis'd with, and they gave their Opinion, that no patent for acting Plays, &c. could tie up the Hands of a succeeding Prince, from granting the like Authority, where it might be thought proper to trust it. But while this Affair was in Agitation, Queen *Mary* dy'd, which of course occasion'd a Cessation of all publick Diversions. In this melancholy Interim, *Betterton*, and his Adherents had more Leisure to solicit their Redress; and the Patentees now finding, that the party against them was gathering Strength, were reduc'd to make sure of as good a Company, as the Leavings of *Betterton's* Interest could form; and these, you may be sure, would not lose this Occasion of setting a price upon their Merit, equal to their own Opinion of it, which was but just double to what they had before. *Powell*, and *Verbruggen*, who had then but forty Shillings a Week, were now rais'd each of them to four Pounds, and others in proportion: As for myself, I was then too insignificant to be taken into their Councils, and consequently stood among those of little Importance, like Cattle in a Market, to be sold to the first Bidder. But the Patentees seeming in the greater Distress for Actors, condescended to purchase me. Thus, without any farther Merit, than that of being a scarce Commodity, I was advanc'd to  
thirty

thirty Shillings a Week: Yet our Company was so far from being full, that our Commanders were forc'd to beat up for Volunteers, in several distant Counties; it was this Occasion that first brought *Johnson* and *Bullock* to the Service of the Theatre-Royal.

Forces being thus rais'd, and the War declared on both Sides, *Betterton*, and his Chiefs had the Honour of an Audience of the *King*, who consider'd them as the only Subjects, whom he had not yet deliver'd from arbitrary Power; and graciously dismiss'd them, with an Assurance of Relief, and Support—Accordingly a select number of them were empower'd by his Royal Licence, to act in a separate Theatre, for themselves. This great point being obtain'd, many People of Quality came into a voluntary Subscription of twenty, and some of forty Guineas a-piece, for the erecting a Theatre within the Walls of the Tennis-Court, in *Lincoln's-Inn Fields*. But as it requir'd 'Time to fit it up, it gave the Patentees more Leisure to muster their Forces, who notwithstanding were not able to take the Field till the *Easter-Monday* in *April* following. Their first attempt was a reviv'd Play, call'd *Abdelazar*, or the *Moor's Revenge*, poorly written, by *Mrs. Behn*. The House was very full, but whether it was the Play, or the Actors, that were not approv'd, the next Day's Audience sunk to nothing. However, we were assur'd, that let the Audiences be never so low, our Masters would make good all Deficiencies, and so indeed they did, 'till towards the End of the Season, when Dues to Balance came too thick upon 'em. But that I may go gradually on with my own Fortune, I must take this Occasion to let you know, by the following Circumstance, how very low my Capacity, as an Actor, was then rated: It was thought necessary, at our Opening, that the Town shou'd be address'd in a new Prologue; but to our great Distress, among several, that were offer'd, not one was judg'd fit to be spoken. This I thought a favourable Occasion, to do myself some remarkable Service, if I should have the good Fortune, to produce one that might be accepted. The next (memorable) Day my Muse brought forth her first

Fruit that was ever made publick ; how good, or bad imports not ; my Prologue was accepted, and resolv'd on to be spoken. This point being gain'd, I began to stand upon Terms, you will say, not unreasonable ; which were, that if I might speak it myself, I would expect no farther Reward for my Labour : This was judg'd as bad as having no Prologue at all ! You may imagine how hard I thought it, that they durst not trust my poor poetical Brat, to my own Care. But since I found it was to be given into other Hands, I insisted that two Guineas should be the price of my parting with it ; which with a Sigh I receiv'd, and *Powell* spoke the *Prologue* : But every line, that was applauded, went sorely to my Heart, when I reflected, that the same Praise might have been given to my own speaking it ; nor could the Success of the Author compensate the Distress of the Actor. However, in the End, it serv'd, in some sort, to mend our People's Opinion of me ; and whatever the Criticks might think of it, one of the Patentees (who, it is true, knew no difference between *Dryden* and *D'ursey*) said, upon the Success of it, that insooth ! I was an ingenious young Man. This sober Compliment (though I could have no Reason to be vain upon it) I thought was a fair Promise to my being in favour. But to Matters of more Moment : now let us reconnoitre the Enemy.

After we had stolen some few Days March upon them, the Forces of *Betterton* came up with us in terrible Order : In about three Weeks following, the new Theatre was open'd against us, with a veteran Company, and a new Train of Artillery ; or in plainer *English*, the old Actors, in *Lincolns-Inn-Fields* began, with a new Comedy of Mr. *Congreve's*, call'd *Love for Love* ; which ran on with such extraordinary Success, that they had seldom occasion to act any other Play, 'till the End of the Season. This valuable Play had a narrow Escape, from falling into the Hands of the Patentees ; for before the Division of the Company, it had been read, and accepted of at the Theatre-Royal : But while the Articles of Agreement for it were preparing, the Rupture, in the Theatrical State,

State, was so far advanc'd, that the Author took Time to pause, before he sign'd them ; when finding that all Hopes of Accommodation were Impracticable, he thought it adviseable, to let it take its Fortune, with those Actors for whom he had first intended the Parts.

Mr. *Congreve* was then in such high Reputation, as an Author, that besides his profits, from this Play, they offer'd him a whole Share with them, which he accepted ; in Consideration of which he oblig'd himself, if his Health permitted, to give them one new Play every Year. *Dryden*, in King *Charles's* Time, had the same Share, with the King's Company ; but he bound himself to give them two Plays every Season. This you may imagine he could not hold long, and I am apt to think, he might have serv'd them better, with one in a Year, not so hastily written. Mr. *Congreve*, whatever Impediment he met with, was three Years before, in pursuance to his Agreement, he produc'd the *Mourning Bride* ; and if I mistake not, the Interval had been much the same, when he gave them the *Way of the World*. But it came out the stronger, for the time it cost him, and to their better Support, when they sorely wanted it : For though they went on with Success for a Year or two, and even when their Affairs were declining, stood in much higher Estimation of the Publick, than their Opponents ; yet, in the End, both Sides were great Sufferers by their Separation ; the natural Consequence of two Houses, which I have already mention'd in a former Chapter.

The first Error this new Colony of Actors fell into, was their inconsiderately parting with *Williams*, and Mrs. *Monfort*, upon a too nice (not to say severe) punctilio ; in not allowing them to be equal Sharers with the rest ; which before they had acted one Play, occasion'd their return to the Service of the Patentees. As I have call'd this an Error, I ought to give my Reasons for it. Though the Industry of *Williams* was not equal to his Capacity ; for he lov'd his Bottle better than his Business ; and though Mrs. *Monfort* was only excellent in Comedy, yet their Merit was too great,  
almost

## 116 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

almost on any Scruples, to be added to the Enemy; and, at worst, they were certainly much more above those they would have rank'd them with, than they could possibly be under those, they were not admitted to be equal to. Of this Fact there is a poetical Record, in the Prologue to *Love for Love*, where the Author speaking of the, then, happy State of the Stage, observes, that if, in Paradise, when two only were there, they both fell; the Surprize was less, if from so numerous a Body as theirs, there had been any Deserters.

*Abate the Wonder, and the Fault forgive,  
If, in our larger Family, we grieve  
One falling Adam, and one tempted Eve.* }

These lines alluded to the Revolt of the Persons above-mention'd.

Notwithstanding the Acquisition of these two Actors, who were of more Importance, than any of those, to whose assistance they came, the affairs of the Patentees were still, in a very creeping Condition; they were now, too late, convinc'd of their Error, in having provok'd their People to this Civil War, of the Theatre! quite chang'd, and dismal, now, was the prospect before them! their Houses thin, and the Town crowding into a new one! Actors at double Salaries, and not half the usual Audiences, to pay them! and all this brought upon them, by those, whom their full Security had contemn'd, and who were now in a fair way of making their Fortunes, upon the ruin'd Interest of their Oppressors.

Here, tho' at this time, my Fortune depended on the Success of the Patentees, I cannot help, in regard to Truth, remembering the rude, and riotous Havock we made of all the late dramatic Honours of the Theatre! all became at once the Spoil of Ignorance, and Self-conceit! *Shakespear* was defac'd, and tortur'd in every signal Character—*Hamlet*, and *Othello*, lost in one Hour all their good Sense, their Dignity, and Fame. *Brutus* and *Cassius* became noisy Blusterers, with



with bold unmeaning Eyes, mistaken Sentiments, and turgid Elocution! Nothing, sure, could more painfully regret a judicious Spectator, than to see, at our first setting out, with what rude Confidence, those Habits, which Actors of real Merit had left behind them, were worn by giddy Pretenders that so vulgarly disgrac'd them! Not young Lawyers in hir'd Robes, and Plumes, at a Masquerade, could be less, what they would seem, or more awkwardly personate the Characters they belong'd to. If, in all these Acts of wanton waste, these Insults, upon injur'd Nature, you observe, I have not yet charg'd one of them upon my self; it is not from an imaginary Vanity, that I could have avoided them; but that I was rather safe, by being too low, at that time, to be admitted even to my Chance of falling into the same eminent Errors: So that as none of those great parts ever fell to my Share, I could not be accountable for the Execution of them: Nor indeed could I get one good part of any kind, 'till many Months after; unless it were of that sort, which nobody else car'd for, or would venture to expose themselves in. The first unintended Favour, therefore, of a part of any Value, Necessity threw upon me, on the following Occasion.

As it has been always judg'd their natural Interest, where there are two Theatres, to do one another as much Mischief as they can; you may imagine it could not be long, before this hostile Policy shew'd itself, in Action. It happen'd, upon our having Information on a *Saturday* Morning, that the *Tuesday* after, *Hamlet* was intended to be acted at the other House, where it had not yet been seen; our merry managing Actors (for they were now in a manner left to govern themselves) resolv'd, at any rate, to steal a March upon the Enemy, and take Possession of the same Play the Day before them: Accordingly, *Hamlet* was given out that Night, to be acted with us on *Monday*. The Notice of this sudden Enterprize, soon reach'd the other House, who, in my Opinion, too much regarded it; for they shorten'd their first Orders, and resolv'd that

that *Hamlet* should to *Hamlet* be oppos'd, on the same Day ; whereas, had they given notice in their Bills, that the same Play would have been acted by them the Day after, the Town would have been in no doubt, which House they should have reserv'd themselves for ; ours must certainly have been empty, and theirs, with more Honour, have been crowded : Experience, many Years after, in like Cases, has convinc'd me, that this would have been the more laudable Conduct. But be that as it may ; when, in their *Monday's* Bills, it was seen that *Hamlet* was up against us, our Consternation was terrible, to find that so hopeful a project was frustrated. In this Distress, *Powell*, who was our commanding Officer, and whose enterprising Head wanted nothing but Skill to carry him thro' the most desperate Attempts ; for, like others of his Cast, he had murder'd many a Hero, only to get into his Cloaths. This *Powell*, I say, immediately call'd a Council of War ; where the Question was, whether he should fairly face the Enemy, or make a Retreat, to some other Play of more probable Safety ? It was soon resolv'd that to act *Hamlet* against *Hamlet*, would be certainly throwing away the Play, and disgracing themselves to little or no Audience ; to conclude, *Powell*, who was vain enough to envy *Betterton*, as his Rival, propos'd to change Plays with them, and that, as they had given out the *Old Batchelor*, and had chang'd it for *Hamlet*, against us ; we should give up our *Hamlet*, and turn the *Old Batchelor* upon them. This Motion was agreed to, *Nemine contradicente* ; but upon Enquiry, it was found, that there were not two Persons among them, who had ever acted in that Play : But that Objection, it seems, (though all the Parts were to be study'd in six Hours) was soon got over ; *Powell* had an Equivalent, *in petto*, that would balance any Deficiency on that Score ; which was, that he would play the *Old Batchelor* himself, and mimick *Betterton*, throughout the whole Part. This happy Thought was approv'd with Delight, and Applause, as whatever can be suppos'd to ridicule Merit, generally gives Joy to those  
that

that want it : Accordingly, the Bills were chang'd, and at the bottom inserted,

*The Part of the Old Batchelor, to be perform'd in Imitation of the Original.*

Printed Books of the Play were sent for in haste, and every Actor had one, to pick out of it the Part he had chosen : Thus, while they were each of them chewing the Moriel, they had most mind to, some one happening to cast his Eye over the *Dramatis Personæ*, found that the main Matter was still forgot, that no body had yet been thought of for the Part of Alderman *Fondlewife*. Here we were all a-ground agen ! nor was it to be conceiv'd who could make the least tolerable Shift with it. This Character had been so admirably acted by *Dogget*, that though it is only seen in the Fourth Act, it may be no Dispraise to the Play, to say, it probably ow'd the greatest Part of its Success to his Performance. But, as the Case was now desperate, any Resource was better than none. Somebody must swallow the bitter Pill, or the Play must die. At last it was recollected, that I had been heard to say, in my wild way of talking, what a vast mind I had to play *Nykin*, by which name the Character was more frequently call'd. Notwithstanding they were thus distress'd about the Disposal of this Part, most of 'em shook their Heads, at my being mention'd for it ; yet *Powell*, who was resolv'd, at all Hazards, to fall upon *Betterton*, and having no concern for what might become of any one, that serv'd his Ends or Purpose, order'd me to be sent for ; and, as he naturally lov'd to set other People wrong, honestly said, before I came, *If the Fool has a mind to blow himself up, at once, let us ev'n give him a clear Stage for it.* Accordingly, the part was put into my Hands, between Eleven and Twelve that Morning, which I durst not refuse, because others were as much straitned in time, for Study, as my self. But I had this casual Advantage of most of them ; that having so constantly observ'd *Dogget's* performance, I wanted but little Trouble, to make

me perfect in the Words ; so that when it came to my turn to rehearse, while others read their parts, from their Books, I had put mine in my pocket, and went through the first Scene without it ; and though I was more abash'd to rehearse so remarkable a part before the Actors (which is natural to most young people) than to act before an Audience, yet some of the better-natur'd encourag'd me so far as to say, they did not think I should make an ill Figure in it : To conclude, the Curiosity to see *Betterton* mimick'd, drew us a pretty good Audience, and *Powell* (as far as Applause is a proof of it) was allow'd to have burlesqu'd him very well. As I have question'd the certain Value of Applause, I hope I may venture, with less Vanity, to say how particular a Share I had of it, in the same play. At my first Appearance, one might have imagin'd, by the various Murmurs of the Audience, that they were in doubt whether *Dogget* himself were not return'd, or that they could not conceive what strange Face it could be, that so nearly resembled him ; for I had laid the Tint of Forty Years, more than my real Age, upon my Features, and, to the most minute placing of a Hair, was dress'd exactly like him : When I spoke, the surprize was still greater, as if I had not only borrow'd his Cloaths, but his Voice too. But tho' that was the least difficult part of him, to be imitated, they seem'd to allow, I had so much of him, in every other Requisite, that my Applause was, perhaps, more than proportionable : For, whether I had done so much, where so little was expected, or that the Generosity of my Hearers were more than usually zealous, upon so unexpected an Occasion, or from what other Motive such Favour might be pour'd upon me, I cannot say ; but, in plain and honest Truth, upon my going off from the first Scene, a much better Actor might have been proud of the Applause, that follow'd me ; after one loud *Plaudit* was ended, and sunk into a general Whisper, that seem'd still to continue their private Approbation, it reviv'd to a second, and again to a third, still lower than the former. If,

to all this, I add, that *Dogget* himself was, in the Pit, at the same time, it would be too rank Affectation, if I should not confess, that, to see him there a Witness of my Reception, was, to me, as consummate a Triumph, as the Heart of Vanity could be indulg'd with. But whatever Vanity I might set upon my self, from this unexpected Success, I found that was no Rule to other People's Judgment of me. There were few or no parts, of the same kind, to be had; nor could they conceive from what I had done in this, what other sort of Characters I could be fit for. If I solicited for any thing of a different Nature, I was answer'd, *That was not in my Way*. And what *was* in my Way, it seems, was not, as yet, resolv'd upon. And though I reply'd, *That I thought any thing, naturally written, ought to be in every one's Way that pretended to be an Actor*; this was look'd upon as a vain, impracticable Conceit of my own. Yet it is a Conceit; that, in forty years farther Experience, I have not yet given up; I still think, that a Painter, who can draw but one sort of Object, or an Actor that shines, but in one Light, can neither of them boast of that ample Genius, which is necessary to form a thorough Master of his Art: For tho' Genius may have a particular Inclination, yet a good History-Painter, or a good Actor will, without being at a loss, give you, upon Demand, a proper Likeness of whatever Nature produces. If he cannot do this, he is only an Actor, as the Shoemaker was allow'd a limited Judge of *Appelles's* Painting; but *not beyond his Last*. Now, tho' to do any one thing well, may have more Merit, than we often meet with; and may be enough, to procure a Man the Name of a good Actor, from the Publick; yet, in my Opinion, it is but still the Name, without the Substance. If his Talent is in such narrow Bounds, that he dares not step out of them, to look upon the Singularities of Mankind, and cannot catch them, in whatever Form they present themselves; If he is not Master of the *Quicquid agunt homines, &c.* in any Shape, that Human Nature is fit to be seen in; If he cannot change himself into several distinct Persons,



so as to vary his whole Tone of Voice, his Motion, his Look, and Gesture, whether in high, or lower Life, and, at the same time, keep close to those Variations, without leaving the Character they singly belong to ; if his best Skill, falls short of this Capacity, what Pretence have we to call him a complete Master of his Art ? And tho' I do not insist, that he ought always to shew himself, in these various Lights, yet, before we compliment him with that Title, he ought, at least, by some few Proofs, to let us see, that he has them all, in his Power. If I am ask'd, who, ever, arriv'd at this imaginary Excellence, I confess the instances are very few ; but I will venture to name *Monfort*, as one of them, whose Theatrical Character I have given, in my last Chapter : For, in his Youth, he had acted Low Humour, with great Success, even down to *Tallboy* in the *Jovial Crew* ; and when he was in great Esteem, as a Tragedian, he was, in Comedy, the most complete Gentleman that I ever saw upon the Stage. Let me add too, that *Betterton*, in his declining Age, was as eminent, in Sir *John Falstaff*, as in the Vigour of it, in his *Othello*.

While I thus measure the Value of an Actor, by the Variety of Shapes he is able to throw himself into, you may naturally suspect, that I am all this while, leading my own Theatrical Character into your Favour : Why, really, to speak as an honest Man, I cannot wholly deny it : But in this, I shall endeavour to be no farther partial to my self, than known Facts will make me ; from the good, or bad Evidence of which, your better Judgment will condemn, or acquit me. And to shew you, that I will conceal no Truth, that is against me, I frankly own, that had I been always left, to my own choice of Characters, I am doubtful whether I might ever have deserv'd an equal Share of that Estimation, which the Publick seem'd to have held me in : Nor am I sure, that it was not Vanity in me, often to have suspected, that I was kept out of the Parts, I had most mind to, by the Jealousy, or Prejudice of my Contemporaries ;

raries ; some Instances of which, I could give you, were they not too slight, to be remember'd : In the mean time, be pleas'd to observe, how slowly, in my younger Days, my Good-fortune came forward.

My early Success in the *Old Batchelor*, of which I have given so full an Account, having open'd no farther way to my Advancement, was enough, perhaps, to have made a young Fellow of more Modesty despair ; but being of a Temper not easily dishearten'd, I resolv'd to leave nothing unattempted, that might shew me, in some new Rank of Distinction. Having then no other Resource, I was at last reduc'd to write a Character for my self ; but as that was not finish'd till about a Year after, I could not, in the Interim, procure any one Part, that gave me the least Inclination to act it ; and consequently, such as I got, I perform'd with a proportionable Negligence. But this Misfortune, if it were one, you are not to wonder at ; for the same Fate attended me, more, or less, to the last Days of my remaining on the Stage. What defect in me, this may have been owing to, I have not yet had Sense enough to find out, but I soon found out as good a thing, which was, never to be mortify'd at it : Though I am afraid this seeming Philosophy was rather owing to my Inclination to Pleasure, than Business. But to my Point. The next Year I produc'd the Comedy of *Love's last Shift* ; yet the Difficulty of getting it to the Stage, was not easily surmounted ; for, at that time, as little was expected from me, as an Author, as had been from my Pretensions to be an Actor. However, Mr. *Southern*, the Author of *Oroonoko*, having had the Patience to hear me read it, to him, happened to like it so well, that he immediately recommended it to the Patentees, and it was accordingly acted in *January*, 1695. In this Play, I gave my self the part of Sir *Novelty*, which was thought, a good Portrait of the Foppery then in fashion. Here too, Mr. *Southern*, though he had approv'd my Play, came into the common Diffidence of me, as an Actor : For, when on the first Day of it, I

was standing, my self, to prompt the *Prologue*, he took me by the Hand, and said, *Young Man! I pronounce thy Play a good one; I will answer for its Success, if thou dost not spoil it by thy own Action.* Though this might be a fair *Salvo*, for his favourable Judgment of the Play; yet if it were his real Opinion of me, as an Actor, I had the good Fortune to deceive him: I succeeded so well, in both, that People seem'd at a Loss, which they should give the preference to. But (now let me shew a little more Vanity, and my Apology for it, shall come after) the Compliment which my Lord *Derby* (then Lord Chamberlain) made me upon it, is, I own, what I had rather not suppress, *viz. That it was the best, first Play, that any Author in his Memory, had produc'd; and that for a young Fellow, to bear himself such an Actor, and such a Writer, in one Day, was something extraordinary.* But as this noble Lord has been celebrated for his Good-nature, I am contented, that as much of this Compliment should be suppos'd to exceed my Deserts, as may be imagin'd to have been heighten'd, by his generous Inclination to encourage a young Beginner. If this Excuse cannot soften the Vanity of telling a Truth so much, in my own Favour, I must lie, at the Mercy of my Reader. But there was a still higher Compliment pass'd upon me, which I may publish without Vanity, because it was not a design'd one, and apparently came from my Enemies, *viz. That, to their certain Knowledge it was not my own:* This Report is taken notice of in my Dedication to the Play. If they spoke Truth, if they knew what other Person it really belong'd to, I will, at least allow them true to their Trust; for above forty Years have since pass'd, and they have not yet reveal'd the Secret.

The new Light, in which the Character of Sir *Novelty* had shewn me, one might have thought, were enough, to have dissipated the Doubts, of what I might now, be possibly good for. But to whatever Chance, my Ill-fortune was due; whether I had still, but little Merit, or that the Managers, if I had any, were

were not competent Judges of it ; or whether I was not generally elbow'd, by other Actors (which I am most inclin'd to think the true Cause) when any fresh parts were to be dispos'd of, not one part of any consequence was I preferr'd to, 'till the Year following : Then, indeed, from Sir *John Vanbrugh's* favourable Opinion of me, I began, with others, to have a better of myself : For he not only did me Honour, as an Author, by writing his *Relapse*, as a Sequel, or Second Part, to *Love's last Shift* ; but as an Actor too, by preferring me, to the chief Character in his own Play ; (which from Sir *Novelty*) he had ennobled by the Style of Baron of *Foppington*. This Play (the *Relapse*) from its new, and easy Turn of Wit, had great Success, and gave me, as a Comedian, a second Flight of Reputation along with it.

As the Matter I write must be very flat, or impertinent, to those, who have no Taste, or Concern for the Stage ; and may to those, who delight in it too, be equally tedious, when I talk of no body but myself ; I shall endeavour to relieve your Patience, by a Word or two more of this Gentleman, so far as he lent his Pen to the Support of the Theatre.

Though the *Relapse* was the first Play this agreeable Author produc'd, yet it was not, it seems, the first he had written ; for he had at that time, by him, (more than) all the Scenes, that were acted of the *Provok'd Wife* ; but being then doubtful, whether he should ever trust them to the Stage, he thought no more of it : But after the Success of the *Relapse*, he was more strongly importun'd, than able, to refuse it to the Publick. Why the last written Play was first acted, and for what Reason they were given to different Stages, what follows, will explain.

In his first Step, into publick Life, when he was but an Ensign, and had a Heart above his Income, he happen'd somewhere, at his Winter Quarters, upon a very slender Acquaintance with Sir *Thomas Skipwith*, to receive a particular Obligation from him, which he had not forgot at the Time I am speaking

126 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

of: When Sir *Thomas's* Interest, in the Theatrical Patent (for he had a large share in it, though he little concern'd himself in the Conduct of it) was rising but very slowly, he thought, that to give it a Lift, by a new Comedy, if it succeeded, might be the handsomest Return he could make to those his former Favours; and having observ'd, that in *Love's last Shift*, most of the Actors had acquitted themselves beyond what was expected of them; he took a sudden Hint from what he lik'd, in that Play, and in less than three Months, in the beginning of *April* following, brought us the *Relapse* finish'd; but the Season being then too far advanc'd, not acted 'till the succeeding Winter. Upon the Success of the *Relapse*, the late Lord *Hallifax*, who was a great Favourer of *Betterton's* Company, having formerly, by way of Family-Amusement, heard the *Provok'd Wife* read to him, in its looser Sheets, engag'd Sir *John Vanbrugh* to revise it, and give it to the Theatre in *Lincoln's-Inn Fields*. This was a Request not to be refus'd to so eminent a Patron of the Muses, as the Lord *Hallifax*, who was equally a Friend and Admirer of Sir *John* himself. Nor was Sir *Thomas Skipwith*, in the least disobliged, by so reasonable a Compliance: After which Sir *John* was again at liberty, to repeat his Civilities to his Friend, Sir *Thomas*; and about the same time, or not long after, gave us the Comedy of *Æsop*; for his Inclination always led him to serve Sir *Thomas*. Besides, our Company, about this time, began to be look'd upon, in another Light; the late Contempt we had lain under, was now wearing off, and from the Success of two or three new Plays, our Actors, by being Originals in a few good Parts, where they had not the Disadvantage of Comparison against them, sometimes found new Favour, in those old Plays, where others had exceeded them.

Of this Good-fortune, perhaps, I had more than my Share, from the two very different, chief Characters, I had succeeded in; for I was equally approv'd in *Æsop*, as the Lord *Foppington*, allowing the Difference, to be no less, than as Wisdom, in a Person deform'd,



deform'd, may be less entertaining to the general Taste, than Folly and Foopery, finely dress'd : For the Character that delivers Precepts of Wisdom, is, in some sort, severe upon the Auditor, by shewing him one wiser than himself. But when Folly is his Object, he applauds himself, for being wiser than the Coxcomb he laughs at : And who is not more pleas'd with an Occasion to commend, than accuse himself ?

Though, to write much, in a little time, is no Excuse for writing ill ; yet Sir *John Vanbrugh's* Pen, is not to be a little admir'd, for its Spirit, Ease, and Readiness, in producing Plays so fast, upon the Neck of one another ; for, notwithstanding this quick Dispatch, there is a clear and lively Simplicity in his Wit, that neither wants the Ornament of Learning, nor has the least Smell of the Lamp in it. As the Face of a fine Woman, with only her Locks loose, about her, may be then in its greatest Beauty ; such were his Productions, only adorn'd by Nature. There is something so catching to the Ear, so easy to the Memory, in all he writ, that it has been observ'd, by all the Actors of my Time, that the Style of no Author whatsoever, gave their Memory less trouble, than that of Sir *John Vanbrugh* ; which I myself, who have been charg'd with several of his strongest Characters, can confirm by a pleasing Experience. And indeed his Wit, and Humour, was so little labour'd, that his most entertaining Scenes seem'd to be no more, than his common Conversation committed to Paper. Here, I confess my Judgment at a Loss, whether, in this, I give him more, or less, than his due Praise ? For may it not be more laudable, to raise an Estate (whether in Wealth, or Fame) by pains, and honest Industry, than to be born to it ? Yet, if his Scenes really were, as to me they always seem'd, delightful, are they not, thus, expeditiously written, the more surprising ? let the Wit, and Merit of them, then, be weigh'd by wiser Criticks, than I pretend to be : But no wonder, while his Conceptions were so full of Life, and Humour, his Muse should be sometimes too warm, to wait the slow Pace of Judgment, or to endure

128 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

ture the Drudgery, of forming a regular Fable to them : Yet we see the *Relapse*, however imperfect in the Conduct, by the mere Force of its agreeable Wit, ran away with the Hearts of its Hearers ; while *Love's last Shift*, which (as Mr. Congreve justly said of it) had only in it, a great many things, that were *like* Wit, that in reality were *not* Wit. And what is still less pardonable (as I say of it my self) has a great deal of Puerility, and frothy Stage-Language in it, yet by the mere moral Delight receiv'd from its Fable, it has been, with the other, in a continued, and equal Possession of the Stage, for more than forty Years.

As I have already promis'd you, to refer your Judgment of me, as an Actor, rather to known Facts, than my own Opinion, (which, I could not be sure, would keep clear of Self-partiality) I must a little farther risque my being tedious, to be as good as my Word. I have elsewhere allow'd, that my want of a strong and full Voice, soon cut short my Hopes of making any valuable Figure, in Tragedy ; and I have been many Years since, convinced, that whatever Opinion I might have of my own Judgment, or Capacity to amend the palpable Errors, that I saw our Tragedians, most in favour, commit ; yet the Auditors, who would have been sensible of any such Amendments (could I have made them) were so very few, that my best Endeavour would have been but an unavailing Labour, or, what is yet worse, might have appeared both to our Actors, and to many Auditors, the vain Mistake of my own Self-Conceit : For so strong, so very near indispensable, is that one Article of Voice, in the forming a good Tragedian, that an Actor may want any other Qualification whatsoever, and yet have a better Chance for Applause, than he will ever have, with all the Skill, in the World, if his Voice is not equal to it. Mistake me not ; I say, for *Applause* only—but Applause does not always stay for, nor always follow intrinsic Merit ; Applause will frequently open, like a young Hound, upon a wrong Scent ; and the Majority of Auditors, you know, are generally

rally compos'd of Babblers, that are profuse of their Voices, before there is any thing on foot, that calls for them : Not but, I grant, to lead, or mislead the Many, will always stand in some Rank of a necessary Merit ; yet when I say a good Tragedian, I mean one, in Opinion of whose *real* Merit, the best Judges would agree.

Having so far given up my Pretensions to the Buskin, I ought now to account for my having been, notwithstanding, so often seen, in some particular Characters in Tragedy, as *Jago, Wolfey, Syphax, Richard the Third, &c.* If, in any of this kind I have succeeded, perhaps it has been a Merit<sup>e</sup> dearly purchas'd ; for, from the Delight I seem'd to take in my performing them, half my Auditors have been persuaded, that a great Share of the Wickedness of them, must have been in my own Nature : If this is true, as true I fear (I had almost said hope) it is, I look upon it rather as a Praise, than Censure of my performance. Aversion there is an involuntary Commendation, where we are only hated, for being like the thing, we *ought* to be like ; a sort of Praise however, which few Actors besides my self could endure : Had it been equal to the usual Praise given to Vertue, my Contemporaries would have thought themselves injur'd, if I had pretended to any Share of it : So that you see, it has been, as much the Dislike others had to them, as Choice, that has thrown me sometimes into these Characters. But it may be farther observ'd, that in the Characters I have nam'd, where there is so much close meditated Mischief, Deceit, Pride, Insolence, or Cruelty, they cannot have the least Cast, or Proser of the Amiable in them ; consequently, there can be no great Demand for that harmonious Sound, or pleasing, round Melody of Voice, which in the softer Sentiments of Love, the Wailings of distressful Vertue, or in the Throws and Swellings of Honour, and Ambition, may be needful to recommend them to our Pity, or Admiration : So that again my want of that requisite Voice might less disqualify me for the vicious, than the virtuous Character. This too may have been  
a more

130 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

a more favourable Reason for my having been chosen for them—a yet farther Consideration, that inclin'd me to them, was that they are generally better written, thicker sown, with sensible Reflections, and come by so much nearer to common Life, and Nature, than Characters of Admiration, as Vice is more the Practice of Mankind than Virtue: Nor could I sometimes help smiling, at those dainty Actors, that were too squeamish to swallow them! as if they were one Jot the better Men, for acting a good Man well, or another Man the worse, for doing equal Justice to a bad one! 'Tis not, sure, *what* we act, but *how* we act, what is allotted us, that speaks our intrinsic Value! as in real Life, the wise Man, or the Fool, be he Prince, or Peasant, will, in either State, be equally the Fool, or the wise Man—but alas! in personated Life, this is no Rule to the Vulgar! they are apt to think all before them real, and rate the Actor according to his borrow'd Vice, or Virtue.

If then I had always too careless a Concern for false, or vulgar Applause, I ought not to complain, if I have had less of it, than others of my Time, or not less of it, than I desir'd: Yet I will venture to say, that from the common, weak Appetite of false Applause, many Actors have run into more Errors, and Absurdities, than their greatest Ignorance could otherwise have committed: If this Charge is true, it will lie chiefly upon the better Judgment of the Spectator to reform it.

But not to make too great a Merit of my avoiding this common Road to Applause, perhaps I was vain enough to think, I had more ways, than one, to come at it. That, in the Variety of Characters I acted, the Chances to win it were the stronger on my Side—That, if the Multitude were not in a Roar, to see me, in *Cardinal Wolsey*, I could be sure of them in *Alderman Fondle-wife*. If they hated me in *Jago*, in *Sir Fopling* they took me for a fine Gentleman; if they were silent at *Syphax*, no *Italian Eunuch* was more applauded than when I sung in *Sir Courthy*. If the Morals of *Albion* were too grave for them, Justice

*Shall*

*Shallow* was a simple, and as merry an old Rake as the wisest of our young ones could wish me. And though the Terror and Detestation rais'd by King *Richard*, might be too severe a Delight for them, yet the more gentle and modern Vanities of a Poet *Bays*, or the well bred Vices of a Lord *Foppington*, were not at all, more than their merry Hearts, or nicer Morals could bear.

These few Instances out of fifty more I could give you, may serve to explain, what sort of Merit, I at most pretended to; which was, that I supply'd, with Variety, what ever I might want of that particular Skill, wherein others went before me. How this Variety was executed (for by that only is its value to be rated) you who have so often been my Spectator, are the proper Judge: If you pronounce my Performance to have been defective, I am condemn'd by my own Evidence; if you acquit me, these Out lines may serve for a Sketch of my Theatrical Character.

## C H A P. VII.

*The State of the Stage continued. The Occasion of Wilks's commencing Actor. His Success. The Facts relating to his Theatrical Talent. Actors more or less esteem'd from their private Characters.*

**T**H E *Lincoln's-inn-Fields* Company were, now in 1693, a Common-wealth, like that of *Holland*, divided from the Tyranny of *Spain*: But the Similitude goes very little farther; short was the Duration of the Theatrical Power! for though Success pour'd in so fast upon them, at their first Opening, that every thing seem'd to support it self; yet Experience, in a Year or two, shew'd them, that they had never been worse govern'd, than when they govern'd themselves! many of them began to make their particular Interest  
more



more their Point, than that of the general: and though some Deference might be had to the Measures, and Advice of *Betterton*, several of them wanted to govern, in their Turn; and were often out of Humour, that their Opinion was not equally regarded.—But have we not seen the same Infirmary in Senates? The Tragedians seem'd to think their Rank as much above the Comedians, as in the Characters they severally acted; when the first were in their Finery, the latter were impatient, at the Expence; and look'd upon it, as rather laid out, upon the real, than the fictitious Person of the Actor; nay, I have known, in our own Company, this ridiculous sort of Regret carry'd so far, that the Tragedian has thought himself injur'd, when the Comedian pretended to wear a fine Coat! I remember *Poovel*, upon surveying my first Dress, in the *Relapse*, was out of all temper, and reproach'd our Master in very rude Terms, that he had not so good a Suit to play *Cæsar Borgia* in! tho' he knew, at the same time, my Lord *Foppington* fill'd the House, when his bouncing *Borgia* would do little more than pay Fiddles, and Candles to it: And though a Character of Vanity, might be suppos'd more expensive in Dress, than possibly one of Ambition; yet the high Heart of this herolical Actor could not bear, that a Comedian should ever pretend to be as well dress'd as himself. Thus again on the contrary, when *Betterton* propos'd to set off a Tragedy, the Comedians were sure to murmur at the Charge of it: And the late Reputation which *Dagget* had acquir'd, from acting his *Ben*, in *Love for Love*, made him a more declar'd Male-content on such Occasions; he over-valu'd Comedy for its being nearer to Nature, than Tragedy; which is allow'd to say many fine things, that Nature never spoke, in the same Words; and supposing his Opinion were just, yet he should have consider'd, that the Publick had a Taste, as well as himself; which, in Policy, he ought to have comply'd with. *Dagget* however could not, with Patience, look upon the costly Trains and Plumes of Tragedy, in which know-

ing

ing himself to be useleſs, he thought were all a vain Extravagance : And when he found his Singularity could no longer oppoſe that Expence, he ſo obſtinately adhered to his own Opinion, that he left the Society of his old Friends, and came over to us at the *Theatre-Royal* : And yet this Actor always ſet up for a Theatrical Patriot. This happen'd in the Winter following the firſt Diviſion of the (only) Company. He came time enough to the *Theatre-Royal*, to act the Part of *Lory*, in the *Relapſe*, an arch Valet, quite after the *French* caſt. pert, and familiar. But it ſuited ſo ill with *Dogget's* dry, and cloſely-natural manner of acting, that upon the ſecond Day he deſir'd it might be diſpos'd of to another ; which the Author complying with, gave it to *Penkethman* ; who though, in other Lights, much his Inferior, yet this Part he ſeem'd better to become. *Dogget* was ſo immoveable in his Opinion of whatever he thought was right, or wrong, that he could never be eaſy, under any kind of Theatrical Government ; and was generally ſo warm, in purſuit of his Interelt, that he often out-ran it ; I remember him three times, for ſome Years, unemploy'd in any Theatre, from his not being able to bear, in common with others, the diſagreeable Accidents, that in ſuch Societies are unavoidable. But whatever Pretences he had form'd for this firſt deſerting, from *Lincoln's-Inn-Fields*, I always thought his beſt Reaſon for it, was, that he look'd upon it as a ſinking Ship ; not only from the melancholy Abatement of their Profits, but likewiſe from the Neglect, and Diſorder in their Government : He plainly ſaw, that their extraordinary ſucceſs at firſt, had made them too confident of its Duration, and from thence had ſlacken'd their Industry:—by which he obſerv'd, at the ſame time, the old Houſe, where there was ſcarce any other Merit than Industry, began to flouriſh. And indeed they ſeem'd not enough to Conſider, that the Appetite of the Publick, like that of a fine Gentleman, could only be kept warm, by Variety ; that let their Merit be never ſo high, yet the Taſte of a Town was not al-

ways constant, nor infallible : That it was dangerous to hold their Rivals in too much Contempt ; for they found, that a young Industrious Company were soon a Match for the best Actors, when too securely negligent : And negligent they certainly were, and fondly fancy'd, that had each of their different Schemes been follow'd, their Audiences would not so suddenly have fallen off.

But alas ! the Vanlty of applauded Actors, when they are not crowded to, as they may have been, makes them naturally impute the Change to any Cause, rather than the true one, Satiety : They are mighty loath, to think a Town, once so fond of them, could ever be tired ; and yet, at one time, or other, more or less, thin Houses have been the certain Fate of the most prosperous Actors, ever since I remember the Stage ! But against this Evil, the provident Patentees had found out a Relief, which the new House were not yet Masters of, *viz.* Never to pay their People, when the Money did not come in ; nor then neither, but in such Proportions, as suited their Conveniency. I my self was one of the many, who for six acting Weeks together, never receiv'd one Day's Pay ; and for some Years after, seldom had above half our nominal Salaries ; But to the best of my Memory, the Finances of the other House, held it not above one Season more, before they were reduc'd to the same Expedient of making the like scanty Payments.

Such was the Distress, and Fortune of both these Companies, since their Division, from the *Theatre-Royal* ; either working at half Wages, or by alternate Successes, intercepting the Bread from one another's Mouths ; irreconcilable Enemies, yet without Hope of Relief, from a Victory on either side ; sometimes both Parties reduc'd, and yet each supporting their Spirits, by seeing the other under the same Calamity.

During this State of the Stage, it was, that the lowest Expedient was made use of, to ingratiate our Company, in the Publick Favour : Our Master, who had

had some time practis'd the Law, and therefore lov'd a Storm, better than fair Weather (for it was his own Conduct chiefly, that had brought the Patent into these Dangers) took nothing so much to Heart, as that Partiality, wherewith he imagin'd the People of Quality had preferr'd the Actors of the other House, to those of his own : To ballance this Misfortune, he was resolv'd, at least, to be well with their Domesticks, and therefore cunningly open'd the upper Gallery to them *gratis* : For before this time no Footman was ever admitted, or had presum'd to come into it, till after the fourth Act was ended : This additional Privilege (the greatest Plague that ever Play-house had to complain of) he conceiv'd would not only incline them to give us a good Word, in the respective Families they belong'd to, but would naturally incite them, to come all Hands aloft, in the Crack of our Applauses : And indeed it so far succeeded, that it often thunder'd from the full Gallery above, while our thin Pit, and Boxes below, were in the utmost Serenity. This riotous Privilege, so craftily given, and which from Custom, was at last ripen'd into Right, became the most disgraceful Nuisance, that ever depreciated the Theatre. How often have the most polite Audiences, in the most affecting Scenes of the best Plays, been disturb'd and insulted, by the Noise and Clamour of these savage Spectators ? From the same narrow way of thinking too, were so many ordinary People, and unlick'd Cubs of Condition, admitted behind our Scenes, for Money, and sometimes without it : The Plagues, and Inconveniences of which Custom, we found so intolerable, when we afterwards had the Stage in our Hands, that at the Hazard of our Lives, we were forc'd to get rid of them ; and our only Expedient was, by refusing Money from all Persons, without distinction, at the Stage Door ; by this means we preserv'd to our selves the Right and Liberty of chusing our own Company there : And by a strict Observance of this Order, we brought what had been before debas'd into all the Licenses of a Lobby, into the Decencies of a Drawing-Room.

About the distressful Time I was speaking of, in the Year 1696, *Wilks*, who now had been five Years in great Esteem on the *Dublin* Theatre, return'd to that of *Drury-Lane*; in which last he had first set out, and had continued to act some small Parts, for one Winter only. The considerable Figure which he so lately made upon the Stage in *London*, makes me imagine that a particular Account of his first commencing Actor may not be unacceptable, to the Curious; I shall, therefore, give it them, as I had it, from his own Mouth.

In King *James's* Reign he had been some time employ'd in the Secretary's Office in *Ireland* (his native Country) and remain'd in it, till after the Battle of the *Boyne*, which completed the Revolution. Upon that happy, and unexpected Deliverance, the People of *Dublin*, among the various Expressions of their Joy, had a Mind to have a Play; but the Actors being dispers'd, during the War, some private Persons agreed, in the best manner they were able, to give one, to the Publick, gratis, at the Theatre. The Play was *Othello*, in which *Wilks* acted the *Moor*; and the Applause he receiv'd in it, warm'd him to so strong an Inclination for the Stage, that he immediately preferr'd it to all his other Views in Life: For he quitted his Post, and with the first fair Occasion came over, to try his Fortune, in the (then only) Company of Actors in *London*. The Person, who supply'd his Post, in *Dublin*, he told me, rais'd to himself, from thence, a Fortune of fifty thousand Pounds. Here you have a much stronger Instance of an extravagant Passion for the Stage, than that which I have elsewhere shewn in my self; I only quitted my Hopes of being preferr'd to the like Post, for it; but *Wilks* quitted his actual Possession, for the imaginary Happiness, which the Life of an Actor presented to him. And, though possibly, we might both have better'd our Fortunes, in a more honourable Station, yet whether better Fortunes might have equally gratify'd our Vanity (the universal Passion of Mankind) may admit of a Question.

Upon



*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 137

Upon his being formerly receiv'd into the *Theatre-Royal* (which was in the Winter after I had been initiated) his Station there was much upon the same Class, with my own; our Parts were generally of an equal Insignificancy, not of consequence enough to give either a Preference: But *Wilks* being more impatient of his low Condition, than I was, (and, indeed, the Company was then so well stock'd with good Actors, that there was very little hope of getting forward) laid hold of a more expeditious way for his Advancement, and return'd again to *Dublin*, with Mr. *Abbott*, the Patentee of that Theatre: to act in his new Company there: There went with him, at the same time, Mrs. *Butler*, whose Character I have already given, and *Asteurt*, who had not appear'd upon any Stage, and was yet only known as an excellent Mimick: *Wilks* having no Competitor in *Dublin*, was immediately preferr'd to whatever Parts his Inclination led him, and his early Reputation on that Stage, as soon rais'd, in him, an Ambition to shew himself on a better. And I have heard him say (in Raillery of the Vanity, which young Actors are liable to) that when the News of *Monfort's* Death came to *Ireland*, he from that time thought his Fortune was made, and took a Resolution to return a second time to *England*, with the first Opportunity; but as his Engagements to the Stage, where he was, were too strong to be suddenly broke from, he return'd not to the *Theatre-Royal*, 'till the Year 1696.

Upon his first Arrival, *Porvel*, who was now in possession of all the chief Parts of *Monfort*, and the only Actor that stood in *Wilks's* way; in seeming Civility, offer'd him his choice of whatever he thought fit, to make his first Appearance in; tho', in reality, the Favour was intended to hurt him. But *Wilks* rightly judg'd it more modest, to accept only of a Part of *Porvel's*, and which *Monfort* had never acted, that of *Palamede* in *Dryden's Marriage Alamode*. Here too, he had the Advantage of having the Ball play'd into his Hand, by the inimitable Mrs. *Monfort*, who was then his *Melantha* in the same Play: Whatever Fame *Wilks*

had brought with him, from *Ireland*, he as yet appear'd but a very raw Actor, to what he was afterwards allow'd to be: His Faults however, I shall rather leave to the Judgments of those, who then may remember him, than to take upon me the disagreeable Office of being particular upon them, farther than by saying, that in this Part of *Palamede*, he was short of *Powel*, and mis'd a good deal of the loose Humour of the Character, which the other more happily hit. But however, he was young, erect, of a pleasing Aspect, and, in the whole, gave the Town, and the Stage, sufficient Hopes of him. I ought to make some Allowances too, for the Restraint he must naturally have been under, from his first Appearance upon a new Stage. But from that he soon recovered, and grew daily, more in Favour not only of the Town, but likewise of the Patentee, whom *Powel*, before *Wilks*'s Arrival, had treated, in almost what manner he pleas'd.

Upon this visible Success of *Wilks*, the pretended Contempt, which *Powel* had held him in, began to sour into an open Jealousy; he, now, plainly saw, he was a formidable Rival, and (which more hurt him) saw too, that other People saw it; and therefore found it high time, to oppose, and be troublesome to him. But *Wilks* happening to be as jealous of his Fame, as the other, you may imagine such clashing Candidates could not be long without a Rupture: In short, a Chal'enge, I very well remember, came from *Powel*, when he was hot headed; but the next Morning he was cool enough, to let it end, in favour of *Wilks*. Yet however the Magnanimity, on either Part, might subside, the Animosity was as deep in the Heart, as ever, tho' it was not afterwards so openly avow'd: For when *Powel* found that intimidating would not carry his Point; but that *Wilks*, when provok'd, would really give Battle, he (*Powel*) grew so out of Humour, that he cock'd his Hat, and in his Passion walk'd off, to the Service of the Company, in *Lincoln's-Inn-Fields*. But there, finding more Competitors, and  
that

that he made a worse Figure among them, than in the Company he came from, he staid but one Winter with them, before he return'd to his old Quarters, in *Drury-Lane*; where, after these unsuccessful Pushes of his Ambition, he, at last became a Martyr to Negligence, and quietly submitted to the Advantages, and Superiority, which (during his late Desertion) *Wilks* had more easily got over him.

However trifling these Theatrical Anecdotes may seem, to a sensible Reader, yet, as the different Conduct of these rival Actors may be of use, to others of the same Profession, and from thence may contribute to the Pleasure of the Publick; let that be my Excuse, for pursuing them. I must, therefore, let it be known, that though, in Voice, and Ear, Nature had been more kind to *Powel*, yet he so often lost the Value of them, by an unheedful Confidence, that the constant wakeful Care, and Decency, of *Wilks*, left the other far behind, in the publick Esteem, and Approbation. Nor was his Memory less tenacious than that of *Wilks*; but *Powel* put too much Trust in it, and idly deferr'd the studying of his Parts, as School-boys do their Exercise, to the last Day; which commonly brings them out proportionably defective. But *Wilks* never lost an Hour of precious Time, and was, in all his Parts, perfect, to such an Exactitude, that I question, if in forty Years, he ever five times chang'd or misplac'd an Article, in any one of them. To be Master of this uncommon Diligence, is adding, to the Gift of Nature, all that is in an Actor's Power; and this Duty of studying perfect, whatever Actor is remiss in, he will proportionably find, that Nature may have been kind to him, in vain: For though *Powel* had an Assurance, that cover'd this Neglect much better than a Man of more Modesty might have done; yet with all his Intrepidity, very often the Diffidence, and Concern for what he was to say, made him lose the Look of what he was to be: While, therefore, *Powel* presided, his idle Example made this Fault so com-

common to others, that I cannot but confess, in the general Infection, I had my Share of it; nor was my too critical Excuse for it, a good one, *viz.* That scarce one Part in five, that fell to my Lot, was worth the Labour. But to shew Respect to an Audience, is worth the best Actor's Labour, and, his Business considered, he must be a very impudent one, that comes before them, with a conscious Negligence of what he is about. But *Wilks* was never known, to make any of these venial Distinctions; nor however barren his Part might be, could bear even the Self-Reproach of favouring his Memory: And I have been astonished, to see him swallow a Volume of Froth, and Infidelity, in a new Play, that we were sure could not live above three Days, tho' favour'd, and recommended to the Stage, by some good Person of Quality. Upon such Occasions, in compassion to his fruitless Toil, and Labour, I have sometimes cry'd out with *Cato*—*Painful Præmience!* So insupportable, in my Sense, was the Task, when the bare Praise, of not having been negligent, was sure to be the only Reward of it. But so indefatigable was the Diligence of *Wilks*, that he seem'd to love it, as a good Man does Virtue, for its own sake; of which the following Instance will give you an extraordinary Proof.

In some new Comedy, he happen'd to complain of a crabbed Speech in his Part, which, he said, gave him more trouble to study, than all the rest of it had done; upon which, he apply'd to the Author, either to soften, or shorten it. The Author that he might make the matter quite easy to him, fairly cut it all out. But when he got home, from the Rehearsal, *Wilks* thought it such an Indignity to his Memory, that any thing should be thought too hard for it, that he actually made himself perfect in that Speech, though he knew it was never to be made use of. From this singular Act of Supererogation, you may judge, how indefatigable the Labour of his Memory must have been, when his Profit, and Honour, were more concern'd to make use of it.

But

But besides this indispensable Quality of Diligence, *Wilks* had the Advantage of a sober Character, in private Life, which *Powel* not having the least Regard to, labour'd under the unhappy Disavour, not to say, Contempt, of the Publick, to whom his licentious Courses were no Secret: Even when he did well, that natural Prejudice pursu'd him; neither the Hero, nor the Gentleman; the young *Ammon*, nor the *Dorimant*, could conceal, from the conscious Spectator, the True *George Powell*. And this sort of Disesteem, or Favour, every Actor, will feel, and more, or less, have his Share of as he *has*, or has *not*, a due Regard to his private Life, and Reputation. Nay, even false Reports shall affect him, and become the Cause, or Pretence at least, of undervaluing, or treating him injuriously. Let me give a known Instance of it, and, at the same time, a Justification of my self, from an Imputation, that was laid upon me, not many Years, before I quitted the Theatre, of which you will see the Consequence.

After the vast Success of that new Species of Dramatick Poetry, the *Beggars Opera*: The Year following, I was so stupid, as to attempt something of the same Kind, upon a quite different Foundation, that of recommending Virtue, and Innocence; which I ignorantly thought, might not have a less Pre-ence to Favour, than setting Greatness, and Authority, in a contemptible, and the most vulgar Vice, and Wick- edness, in an amiable Light. But behold how fondly I was mistaken! *Love in a Riddle* (for so my new-fangled Performance was call'd) was as vilely damn'd, and hooted at, as so vain a Presumption, in the idle Cause of Virtue, could deserve. Yet this is not what I complain of; I will allow my Poetry, to have been as much below the other, as Taste, or Criticism, can sink it: I will grant likewise, that the applauded Author of the *Beggars Opera* (whom I knew to be an honest good natur'd Man, and who, when he had descended to write more like one in the Cause of Virtue, had been as unfortunate, as others of that Class;) I will grant, I say, that in his *Beggars Opera*, he had more  
skillfully



skillfully gratify'd the Publick Taste, than all the brightest Authors that ever writ before him; and I have sometimes thought, from the Modesty of his Motto, *Nos hæc novimus esse nihil*, that he gave them that Performance, as a Satyr upon the Depravity of their Judgment (as *Ben. Johnson*, of old, was said to have given his *Bartholomew-Fair*, in Ridicule of the vulgar Taste, which had dislik'd his *Sejanus*) and that, by artfully seducing them, to be the Champions of the Immoralities he himself detested, he should be amply reveng'd on their former Severity, and Ignorance. This were indeed a Triumph! which, even the Author of *Cato*, might have envy'd! *Cato*, 'tis true, succeeded, but reach'd not, by full forty Days, the Progress, and Applauses, of the *Beggars Opera*. Will it, however, admit of a Question, which of the two Compositions a good Writer, would rather wish to have been the Author of? Yet, on the other side must we not allow, that to have taken a whole Nation, High, and Low, into a general Applause, has shewn a Power in Poetry, which, tho' often attempted in the same kind, none but this one Author, could ever yet arrive at? By what Rule, then, are we to judge of our true National Taste? But, to keep a little closer to my Point.

The same Author, the next Year, had, according to the Laws of the Land, transported his Hero to the *West-Indies*, in a Second Part to the *Beggars Opera*; but so it happen'd, to the Surprize of the Publick, this Second Part was forbid to come upon the Stage! Various were the Speculations, upon this Act of Power: Some thought that the Author, others that the Town, was hardly dealt with; a third sort, who perhaps had envy'd him the Success of his First Part, affirm'd, when it was printed, that whatever the Intention might be, the Fact was in his Favour, that he had been a greater Gainer, by Subscriptions to his Copy, than he could have been by a bare Theatrical Presentation. Whether any Part of these Opinions were true, I am not concern'd to determine, or consider. But how they affected me, I am going to tell you. Soon after this

Pro-

Prohibition, my Performance was to come upon the Stage, at a time, when many People were out of Humour, at the late Disappointment, and seem'd willing to lay hold of any Pretence of making a Reprizal. Great Umbrage was taken, that I was permitt'd. to have the whole Town to my self, by this absolute Forbiddance of what, they had more mind to have been entertain'd with. And, some few Days before my Bawble was acted, I was inform'd, that a strong Party would be made against it: This Report I slighted, as not conceiving why it should be true; and when I was afterwards told what was the pretended Provocation of this Party, I slighted it, still more, as having less Reason to suppose, any Persons could believe me capable (had I had the Power) of giving such a Provocation. The Report, it seems, that had run against me, was this: That, to make way for the Success of my own Play, I had privately found means, or made Interest, that the Second Part of the *Beggars Opera*, might be suppress'd. What an involuntary Compliment did the Reporters of this Falshood make me? to suppose me of Consideration enough, to influence a great Officer of State, to gratify the Spleen, or Envy, of a Comedian, so far, as to rob the Publick of an innocent Diversion (if it were such) that none, but that cunning Comedian, might be suffered to give it them. This is so very gross a Supposition, that it needs only its own senseless Face, to confound it; let that alone, then, be my defence against it. But against blind Malice, and staring Inhumanity, whatever is upon the Stage, has no Defence! There, they knew, I stood helpless, and expos'd, to whatever they might please to load, or asperse me with. I had not considered, poor Devil! that, from the Security of a full Pit, Dunces, might be Criticks, Cowards valiant, and 'Prentices Gentlemen! Whether any such were concern'd in the Murder of my Play, I am not certain; for I never endeavour'd, to discover any one of its Assassins; I cannot afford them a milder Name, from their unmanly manner of destroying it. Had it been heard, they might have

have left me nothing to say to them : 'Tis true, it faintly held up its wounded Head, a second Day, and would have spoke for Mercy, but was not suffer'd. Not even the Presence of a Royal Heir apparent, could protect it. But then I was reduc'd to be serious with them; their Clamour, then, became an Insolence, which I thought it my Duty, by the Sacrifice of any Interest of my own, to put an end to. I therefore quitted the Actor, for the Author, and, stepping forward to the Pit, told them, *That since I found they were not inclin'd, that this Play should go forward, I gave them my Word, that after this Night, it should never be acted agen: But that, in the mean time, I hop'd, they would consider, in whose Presence they were, and for that Reason, at least, would suspend what farther Marks of their Displeasure, they might imagine I had deserved.* At this there was a dead Silence; and, after some little Pause, a few civiliz'd Hands, signify'd their Approbation. When the Play went on, I observ'd about a Dozen Persons, of no extraordinary Appearance, sullenly walk'd out of the Pit. After which, every Scene of it, while uninterrupted, met with more Applause, than my best Hopes had expected. But it came too late: Peace to its *Manes*! I had given my Word it should fall, and I kept it, by giving out another Play, for the next Day, though I knew the Boxes were all lett, for the same again. Such, then, was the Treatment I met with: How much of it, the Errors of the Play might deserve, I refer to the Judgment of those, who may have Curiosity, and idle Time enough to read it. But if I had no occasion to complain of the Reception it met with, from its *quieted* Audience, sure it can be no great Vanity, to impute its Disgraces chiefly, to that severe Resentment, which a groundless Report of me had inflam'd: Yet those Disgraces have left me something to boast of, an Honour preferable, even to the Applause of my Enemies: A noble Lord came behind the Scenes, and told me, from the Box, where he was in waiting, *That what I said, to quiet the Audience, was extremely well taken there; and that I had been*

com-

commended for it, in a very obliging manner. Now, though this was the only Tumult, that I have known to have been so effectually appeas'd, these fifty Years, by any Thing that could be said to an Audience, in the same Humour, I will not take any great Merit to my self upon it; because when, like me, you will but humbly submit to their doing you all the Mischief they can, they will, at any time, be satisfy'd.

I have mention'd this particular Fact, to inforce what I before observ'd, That the private Character of an Actor, will always, more or less, affect his publick Performance. And if I suffer'd so much, from the bare *Suspicion* of my having been guilty of a base action; what should not an Actor expect, that is ready enough, to think his whole private Character of no consequence? I could offer many more, tho' less severe Instances, of the same Nature. I have seen the most tender Sentiment of Love, in Tragedy, create Laughter, instead of Compassion, when it has been applicable to the real Engagements of the Person, that utter'd it. I have known good parts thrown up, from an humble Consciousness, that something in them, might put an Audience in mind of — what was rather wish'd might be forgotten: Those remarkable Words of *Evadne*, in the *Maid's Tragedy*——— *A Maiden-head, Amintor, at my Years?* ——— have sometimes been a much stronger Jest, for being a true one. But these are Reproaches, which in all Nations, the Theatre must have been us'd to, unless we could suppose Actors something more, than Human Creatures, void of Faults, or Frailties. 'Tis a Misfortune, at least, not limited to the *English* Stage. I have seen the better-bred Audience, in *Paris*, made merry, even with a modest Expression, when it has come from the Mouth of an Actress, whose private Character it seem'd not to belong to. The apprehension of these kind of Fleers, from the Witlings of a Pit, has been carry'd so far, in our own Country, that a late valuable Actress (who was conscious her Beauty was not her greatest Merit) desired the Warmth of some Lines might be abated, when they have made her too re-

O

marka;

markably handsome : But in this Discretion she was alone, few others were afraid of undeserving the finest things, that could be said, to them. But to consider this Matter seriously, I cannot but think, at a Play, a sensible Auditor would contribute all he could, to his being well deceiv'd, and not suffer his Imagination, so far to wander, from the well-acted Character before him, as to gratify a frivolous Spleen, by Mocks, or personal Sneers, on the performer, at the Expence of his better Entertainment. But I must now take up *Wilks*, and *Powel*, again, where I left them.

Though the Contention for Superiority, between them, seem'd about this time, to end in favour of the former, yet the Distress of the Patentee (in having his Servant his Master, as *Powel* had lately been) was not much reliev'd by the Victory ; he had only chang'd the Man, but not the Malady : For *Wilks*, by being in Possession of so many good parts, fell into the common Error of most Actors, that of over-rating their Merit, or never thinking it is so thoroughly consider'd, as it ought to be ; which generally makes them proportionably troublesome to the Master ; who, they might consider, only pays them, to profit by them. The Patentee therefore found it as difficult to satisfy the continual Demands of *Wilks*, as it was dangerous to refuse them ; very few were made, that were not granted, and as few were granted, as were not grudging him : Not but our good Master, was as sly a Tyrant, as ever was at the Head of a Theatre ; for he gave the Actors more Liberty, and fewer Days pay, than any of his Predecessors : He would laugh with them over a Bottle, and bite them, in their Bargains : He kept them poor, that they might not be able to rebel ; and sometimes merry, that they might not think of it : all their Articles of agreement had a Clause in them, that he was sure to creep out at, *viz.* Their respective Salaries, were to be paid, in such manner and proportion, as others of the same Company were paid ; which in effect, made them all, when he pleas'd, but limited Sharers of Loss, and himself sole proprietor  
of



of profits; and this Loss, or Profit, they only had such verbal accounts of, as he thought proper to give them. 'Tis true, he would sometimes advance them Money (but not more, than he knew at most could be due to them) upon their Bonds; upon which, whenever they were mutinous, he would threaten to sue them. This was the Net we danc'd in for several Years: But no Wonder we were Dupes, while our Master was a Lawyer. This Grievance, however, *Wilks* was resolv'd for himself, at least, to remedy at any rate; and grew daily more intractable, for every Day his Redress was delay'd. Here our Master found himself under a Difficulty, he knew not well how to get out of: For as he was a close subtle Man, he seldom made use of a Confident, in his Schemes of Government: But here the old Expedient of Delay, would stand him in no longer stead; *Wilks* must instantly be comply'd with, or *Porret* come again into power! In a Word, he was push'd so home, that he was reduc'd even to take my Opinion into his assistance: For he knew I was a Rival to neither of them; perhaps too, he had fancy'd, that from the Success of my first Play, I might know as much of the Stage, and what made an Actor valuable, as either of them: He saw too, that tho' they had each of them five good parts to my one; yet the applause which in my few, I had met with, was given me by better Judges, than, as yet, had approv'd of the best they had done. They generally measured the goodness of a part, by the Quantity, or Length of it: I thought none bad for being short, that was closely natural; nor any the better, for being long, without that valuable Quality. But, in this, I doubt, as to their Interest, they judg'd better, than my self; for I have generally observ'd, that those, who do a great deal not ill, have been preferr'd to those, who do but little, though never so masterly. And therefore I allow, that while there were so few good parts, and as few good Judges of them, it ought to have been no Wonder to me, that as an Actor, I was less valued, by the Master, or the common People, than either of them:

all the advantage I had of them, was, that by not being troublesome, I had more of our Master's personal Inclination, than any Actor of the male Sex; and so much of it, that I was almost the only one, whom at that time, he us'd to take into his parties of pleasure; very often *tete à tete*, and sometimes, in a *Partie quar-rée*. These then were the Qualifications, however good, or bad, to which may be imputed our Master's having made Choice of me, to assist him in the Difficulty, under which he now labour'd. He was himself sometimes inclin'd to let up *Powel* again, as a Check upon the over-bearing Temper of *Wilks*: Tho' to say Truth, he lik'd neither of them; but was still under a Necessity, that one of them should preside; tho' he scarce knew which of the two Evils to chuse. This Question, when I happen'd to be alone with him, was often debated in our Evening Conversation; nor indeed, did I find it an easy matter to know which party I ought to recommend to his Election. I knew they were neither of them Well-wishers to me, as in common they were Enemies to most Actors, in proportion to the Merit, that seem'd to be rising in them. But as I had the prosperity of the Stage more at Heart, than any other Consideration, I could not be long undetermin'd, in my Opinion, and therefore gave it to our Master, at once, in Favour of *Wilks*. I, with all the Force I could muster, insisted, " That if *Pow-*  
 " *el* were preferr'd, the ill Example of his Negli-  
 " gence, and abandon'd Character (whatever his Me-  
 " rit on the Stage might be) would reduce our Com-  
 " pany to Contempt, and Beggary; observing at the  
 " same time, in how much better Order our Affairs  
 " went forward, since *Wilks* came among us, of which  
 " I recounted several Instances, that are not so neces-  
 " sary to tire my Reader with. All this, though he  
 " allow'd to be true; yet *Powel*, he said, was a better  
 " Actor than *Wilks*, when he minded his Business  
 " (that is to say, when he was, what he seldom was,  
 " sober) But *Powel*, it seems, had a still greater Me-  
 " rit to him, which was, (as he observ'd) that when  
 " Affairs were in his Hands, he had kept the Ac-  
 " tors

"tors quiet, without one Day's Pay, for six Weeks together, and it was not every body could do that ; "for you see, said he, *Wilks* will never be easy, unless I give him his whole pay, when others have it not, and what an Injustice would that be to the rest, "if I were to comply with him ? How do I know, "but then they may be all, in a Mutiny, and may-  
"hap (that was his Expression) with *Powel* at the "Head of 'em ? " By this Specimen of our Debate, it may be judg'd, under how particular, and merry a Government, the Theatre then labour'd. To conclude, this Matter ended in a Resolution, to sign a new agreement, with *Wilks*, which entitled him, to his full pay of four Pounds a Week, without any conditional Deductions. How far soever my Advice might have contributed to our Master's settling his Affairs upon this Foot, I never durst make the least Merit of it to *Wilks*, well knowing that his great Heart would have taken it as a mortal affront, had I (tho' never so distantly) hinted, that his Demands had needed any assistance, but the Justice of them. From this Time, then, *Wilks* became first Minister, or Bustle-master-general of the Company. He, now, seem'd to take new Delight, in keeping the Actors close to their Business ; and got every Play reviv'd with Care, in which he had acted the chief part, in *Dublin* : 'Tis true, this might be done with a particular View of setting off himself to advantage ; but if, at the same time, it serv'd the Company, he ought not to want our Commendation : Now, tho' my own Conduct, neither had the appearance of his Merit, nor the Reward that follow'd his Industry ; I cannot help observing, that it shew'd me, to the best of my power, a more cordial Common wealth's Man : His first Views, in serving himself, made his Service to the whole but an incidental Merit ; whereas, by my prosecuting the Means, to make him easy, in his Pay, unknown to him, or without asking any Favour for my self, at the same time, I gave a more unquestionable Proof of my preferring the Publick, to my private Interest : From the same

principle I never murmur'd at whatever little parts fell to my Share, and tho' I knew it would not recommend me to the Favour of the common People, I often submitted to play wicked Characters, rather than they should be worse done by weaker Actors than myself: But perhaps, in all this Patience under my Situation, I supported my Spirits, by a conscious Vanity: For I fancy'd I had more Reason to value myself, upon being sometimes the Confident, and Companion of our Master, than *Wilks* had, in all the more publick Favours he had extorted from him. I imagin'd too, there was sometimes as much Skill to be shewn, in a short part, as in the most voluminous, which he generally made choice of; that even the coxcomby Follies of a *Sir John Daw*, might as well distinguish the Capacity of an Actor, as all the dry Enterprizes, and busy Conduct of a *Truewit*. Nor could I have any Reason to repine at the Superiority he enjoy'd, when I consider'd at how dear a Rate it was purchas'd, at the continual Expence of a restless Jealousy, and fretful Impatience——These were the Passions, that, in the height of his Successes, kept him lean to his last Hour, while what I wanted in Rank, or Glory, was amply made up to me, in Ease and Chearfulness. But let not this Observation either lessen his Merit, or lift up my own; since our different Tempers were not, in our Choice, but equally natural, to both of us. To be employ'd on the Stage was the Delight of his Life; to be justly excus'd from it, was the Joy of mine: I lov'd Ease, and he Pre-eminence: In that, he might be more commendable. Tho' he often disturb'd me, he seldom could do it, without more disordering himself: In our Disputes, his Warmth could less bear Truth, than I could support manifest Injuries: He would hazard our Undoing, to gratify his Passions, tho' otherwise an honest Man; and I rather chose to give up my Reason, or not see my Wrong, than ruin our Community by an equal Rashness. By this opposite Conduct, our accounts at the End of our Labours, stood thus: While he liv'd, he was the elder Man, when he dy'd, he was not so old as I am: He never  
left

est the Stage, till he left the World. I never so well enjoy'd the World, as when I left the Stage: he dy'd in Possession of his Wishes; and I, by having had a less cholerick Ambition, am still tasting mine, in Health, and Liberty. But, as he in a great measure wore out the Organs of Life, in his incessant Labours, to gratify the publick, the many whom he gave pleasure to, will always owe his Memory a favourable Report—Some Facts, that will vouch for the Truth of this account, will be found in the Sequel of these Memoirs. If I have spoke with more Freedom of his quondam Competitor *Powel*, let my good Intentions to future Actors, in shewing what will so much concern them to avoid, be my Excuse for it: For though *Powel* had from Nature, much more than *Wilks*; in Voice, and Ear, in Elocution, in Tragedy, and Humour in Comedy, greatly the Advantage of him; yet, as I have observ'd, from the Neglect, and Abuse of those valuable Gifts, he suffer'd *Wilks*, to be of thrice the Service to our Society. Let me give another Instance of the Reward, and Favour which in a Theatre, Diligence, and Sobriety seldom fail of: *Mills* the elder grew into the Friendship of *Wilks*, with not a great deal more, than those useful Qualities to recommend him: he was an honest, quiet, careful Man, of as few Faults, as Excellencies, and *Wilks* rather chose him for his second, in many Plays, than an Actor of perhaps greater Skill, that was not so laboriously diligent. And from this constant assiduity, *Mills*, with making to himself a Friend in *Wilks*, was advanc'd to a larger Salary, than any Man-actor had enjoy'd, during my time, on the Stage. I have yet to offer a more happy Recommendation of Temperance, which a late celebrated Actor was warn'd into, by the mis-conduct of *Powel*. About the Year, that *Wilks* return'd from *Dublin*, *Booth*, who had commenc'd Actor, upon that Theatre, came over to the Company, in *Lincolns-Inn-Fields*: He was, then, but an Under-graduate of the Buskin, and as he told me himself, had been for some time too frank a Lover of the Bottle; but having



## 152 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

having had the Happiness to observe, into what Contempt, and Distresses *Powel* had plung'd himself by the same Vice, he was so struck with the Terror of his Example, that he fix'd a Resolution (which from that time, to the End of his Days, he strictly observ'd) of utterly reforming it; an uncommon Act of Philosophy in a young Man! of which in his Fame, and Fortune, he afterwards enjoy'd the Reward and Benefit. These Observations I have not meerly thrown together as a Moralist, but to prove, that the briskest loose Liver, or intemperate Man (though Morality were out of the Question) can never arrive at the necessary Excellencies of a good, or useful Actor.

### C H A P. VIII.

*The Patentee of Drury-lane wiser than his Actors. His particular Management. The Author continues to write Plays. Why. The best dramattick Poets censur'd, by J. Collier, in his Short View of the Stage. It has a good Effect. The Master of the Revels, from that time, cautious, in his licensing new Plays. A Complaint against him. His Authority founded upon Custom only. The late Law for fixing that Authority, in a proper Person, consider'd.*

**T**HOUGH the Master of our Theatre had no Conception himself of Theatrical Merit, either in Authors, or Actors; yet his Judgment was govern'd by a saving Rule, in both: He look'd into his Receipts for the Value of a Play, and from common Fame he judg'd of his Actors. But by whatever Rule he was govern'd, while he had prudently reserv'd to himself a Power of not paying them more than their Merit could get, he could not be much deceiv'd by their being over, or under-valued. In a Word, he had, with great Skill, inverted the Constitution of the Stage,  
and

## The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c. 153

and quite chang'd the Channel of Profits arising from it: Formerly (when there was but one Company) the Proprietors punctually paid the Actors, their appointed Salaries, and took to themselves only the clear Profits; But our wiser Proprietor, took first out of every Day's Receipts, Two Shillings in the Pound to himself; and left their Salaries to be paid, only, as the less, or greater Deficiencies of acting (according to his own accounts) would permit. What seem'd most extraordinary in these Measures, was, that at the same time, he had persuaded us to be contented with our Condition, upon his assuring us, That as fast as Money would come in, we should all be paid our Arrears: And, that we might not have it always in our Power to say he had never intended to keep his Word; I remember, in a few Years after this Time, he once paid us Nine Days, in one Week: This happen'd, when the *Funeral*, or *Grief Alamoë* was first acted, with more than expected Success. Whether this well-tim'd Bounty was only allow'd us, to save Appearances, I will not say; but if that was his real Motive for it, it was too costly a Frolick to be repeated, and was at least, the only Grimace of its Kind he vouchsafed us; we never having received one Day more of those arrears in above Fifteen Years Service.

While the Actors were in this Condition, I think I may very well be excus'd, in my presuming to write Plays; which I was forc'd to do, for the Support of my increasing Family, my precarious Income, as an Actor, being then too scanty, to supply it, with even the Necessaries of Life.

It may be observable too, that my Muse, and my Spouse, were equally prolific; that the one was seldom the Mother of a Child, but, in the same Year, the other made me the Father of a Play: I think we had about a Dozen of each sort between us; of both which Kinds, some dy'd in their Infancy, and near an equal number of each were alive, when I quitted the Theatre. But it is no wonder, when a Muse is only call'd upon, by Family-Duty, she should not always rejoice,

rejoice, in the Fruit of her Labour. To this Necessity of Writing, then, I attribute the Defects of my second Play, which coming out too hastily, the Year after my first, turn'd to very little account. But having got as much, by my First, as I ought to have expected, from the Success of them Both, I had no great Reason to complain: Not but, I confess, so bad was my Second, that I do not chuse to tell you the Name of it; and, that it might be peaceably forgotten, I have not given it a place, in the Two Volumes of those I publish'd in *Quarto*, in the Year 1721. And whenever I took upon me, to make some dormant Play of an old Author, to the best of my Judgment, fitter for the Stage, it was, honestly, not to be idle, that set me to work; as a good Housewife will mend old Linnen, when she has not better Employment. But when I was more warmly engag'd, by a Subject, entirely new, I only thought it a good Subject, when it seem'd worthy of an abler Pen, than my own, and might prove as useful to the Hearer, as profitable, to myself: therefore, whatever any of my Productions, might want of Skill, Learning, Wit, or Humour; or however unqualify'd I might be, to instruct others, who so ill govern'd myself: Yet such Plays (entirely my own) were not wanting, at least, in what our most admired Writers seem'd to neglect, and without which, I cannot allow the most taking Play, to be intrinsically Good, or to be a Work, upon which a Man of Sense and Probity should value himself: I mean, when they do not, as well *prodesse*, as *delectare*, give profit, with Delight. The *Utile dulci* was, of old, equally the Point; and has always been my Aim, however wide of the Mark, I may have shot my Arrow. It has often given me amazement, that our best Authors of that Time, could think the Wit, and Spirit of their Scenes, could be an Excuse for making the Looseness of them publick. The many Instances of their Talents so abus'd, are too glaring, to need a closer Comment, and are sometimes too gross to be recited. If then, to have avoided this Imputation, or rather to have had the Interest, and Honour of Virtue, always in view,

can give Merit, to a Play; I am contented, that my Readers should think such Merit, the All, that mine have to boast of. Libertines, of mere Wit, and Pleasure, may laugh at these grave Laws, that would limit a lively Genius; but every sensible honest Man, conscious of their Truth, and Use, will give these Ralliers Smile for Smile, and shew a due Contempt, for their Merriment.

But while our Authors took these extraordinary Liberties with their Wit, I remember, the Ladies were then observ'd, to be decently afraid of venturing barefac'd to a new Comedy, 'till they had been assur'd they might do it, without the Risque of an Insult, to their Modesty; or, if their Curiosity were too strong, for their Patience, they took care, at least, to save Appearances, and rarely came upon the first Days of acting, but in Masks (then daily worn, and admitted, in the Pit, the Side boxes, and Gallery) which Custom, however, had so many ill Consequences attending it, that it has been abolish'd these many Years.

These Immoralities of the Stage, had, by an avow'd Indulgence, been creeping into it, ever since King *Charles* his Time: Nothing that was loose, could then be too low for it: The *London Cuckolds*, the most Rank Play that ever succeeded, was then in the highest Court-Favour. In this almost general Corruption, *Dryden*, whose Plays were more fam'd for their Wit, than their Chastity, led the Way, which he fairly confesses, and endeavours to excuse in his Epilogue to the *Pilgrim*, reviv'd in 1700, for his Benefit, in his declining Age, and Fortune. The following Lines of it, will make good my Observation.

*Perhaps the Parson stretch'd a Point too far,  
When, with our Theatres, he wag'd a War.  
He tells you, that this very moral Age  
Receiv'd the first Infection from the Stage.  
But sure, a banish'd Court, with Lewdness fraught,  
The Seeds of open Vice returning brought.*

*Thus*

156 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

*Thus lodg'd (as Vice by great Example thrives)  
It first debauch'd the Daughters, and the Wives.  
London, a fruitful Soil, yet never bore  
So plentiful a Crop of Horns before.  
The Poets, who must live by Courts, or starve,  
Were proud, so good a Government to serve;  
And mixing with Buffoons, and Pimps profane,  
Tainted the Stage, for some small Snip of Gain:  
For they, like Harlots under Banquets profess,  
Took all th' ungodly Pains, and got the least.  
Thus did the thriving Malady prevail,  
The Court, it's Head, the Poets but the Tail.  
The Sin was of our Native Growth, 'tis true,  
The Scandal of the Sin was wholly new.  
Mistresses there were but modestly conceal'd;  
Whitehall the naked Venus first reveal'd.  
Where standing, as at Cyprus, in her Shrine,  
The Strumpet was ador'd with Rites Divine, &c.*

This Epilogue, and the Prologue, to the same Play, written by *Dryden*, I spoke myself, which not being usually done by the same person, I have a mind, while I think of it, to let you know on what Occasion they both fell to my Share, and how other Actors were affected by it.

*Sir John Vanbrugh*, who had given some light Touches of his Pen to the *Pilgrim*, to assist the Benefit-Day of *Dryden*, had the Disposal of the parts; and I being then, as an Actor, in some Favour with him, he read the Play first, with me alone, and was pleas'd to offer me my choice of what I might like best for myself, in it. But as the chief Characters were not (according to my Taste) the most shining, it was no great Self-denial in me, that I desired, he would first take care of those, who were more difficult to be pleas'd; I therefore only chose, for my self, two  
short



short incidental parts, that of the *Stuttering Cook*, and the *Mad Englishman*; in which homely Characters, I saw more Matter for Delight, than those that might have a better pretence to the Amiable: And when the Play came to be acted, I was not deceiv'd, in my Choice. Sir *John*, upon my being contented with so little a Share in the Entertainment, gave me the Epilogue to make up my Mess, which being written so much above the Strain of common Authors, I confess, I was not a little pleas'd with. And *Dryden*, upon his hearing me repeat it to him, made me a further Compliment of trusting me with the Prologue. This so particular Distinction, was look'd upon, by the Actors, as something too extraordinary. But no one was so impatiently ruffled at it, as *Wilks*, who se'dom chose soft Words, when he spoke of any thing he did not like. The most gentle thing he said of it was, That he did not understand such Treatment; that, for his part, he look'd upon it, as an affront to all the rest of the Company, that there should be but One, out of the Whole, judg'd fit to speak either a Prologue, or an Epilogue. To quiet him, I offer'd to decline either in his Favour, or both, if it were equally easy to the Author: But he was too much concern'd, to accept of an Offer, that had been made to another, in preference to himself; and which he seem'd to think his best way of resenting, was to contemn. But from that time, however, he was resolv'd, to the best of his Power, never to let the first Offer of a Prologue escape him: Which little ambition, sometimes, made him pay too dear, for his Success; the Flatness of the many miserable Prologues, that by this means fell to his Lot, seem'd woefully unequal, to the few good ones, he might have reason to triumph in.

I have given you this Fact, only as a Sample of those frequent Rubs, and Impediments I met with, when any Step was made to my being distinguish'd as an Actor; and from this Incident too, you may partly see what occasion'd so many Prologues, after the Death of *Bentley*, to fall into the Hands of one Speaker: But it is not every Successor, to a vacant Post, that brings in-

to it, the Talents equal to those of a Predecessor. To speak a good Prologue well, is, in my Opinion, one of the hardest Parts, and strongest proofs of sound Elocution; of which, I confess, I never thought, that any of the several who attempted it, shew'd themselves, by far, equal Masters to *Betterton*. *Betterton*, in the Delivery of a good Prologue, had a natural Gravity, that gave Strength to good Sense; a temper'd Spirit, that gave Life to Wit; and a dry Reserve, in his Smile, that threw Ridicule into its brightest Colours; of these Qualities, in the speaking of a Prologue, *Booth* only had the first, but attain'd not to the other two: *Wills* had Spirit, but gave too loose a Rein to it, and it was seldom he could speak a grave and weighty Verse, harmoniously: His Accents were frequently too sharp, and violent, which sometimes occasion'd his eagerly cutting off half the Sound of Syllables, that ought to have been gently melted into the Melody of Metre. In Verses of Humour too, he would sometimes carry the Mimickry farther than the Hint would bear, even to a trifling Light, as if himself were pleas'd to see it so glittering. In the Truth of this Criticism, I have been confirm'd by that whole Judgment I dare more confidently rely on, than my own: *Wills* had many Excellencies; but if we leave Prologue-speaking out of the Number, he will still have enough to have made him a valuable Actor. And I only make this Exception from them, to caution others from imitating, what in his Time, they might have too implicitly admired. But I have a Word or two more to say concerning the Immoralities of the Stage. Our Theatrical Writers were not only accus'd of Immorality, but Prophaneness; many flagrant Instances of which were collected, and publish'd by a Non-juring Clergyman, *Jeremy Collier*, in his *View of the Stage*, &c. about the Year 1697. However just his Charge against the Authors, that then wrote for it, might be, I cannot but think his Sentence, against the Stage itself, is unequal; Reformation, he thinks, too mild a Treatment for it, and is therefore for laying his Ax to the Root of it. If this were to be a

Rule of Judgment, for Offences of the same Nature, what might become of the Pulpit, where many a seditions and corrupted Teacher, has been known, to cover the most pernicious Doctrine with the Mask of Religion? This puts me in mind of what the noted *Jo. Hains*, the Comedian, a Fellow of a wicked Wit, said upon this Occasion; who being ask'd, What could transport *Mr. Collier* into so blind a Zeal, for a general Suppression of the Stage, when only some particular Authors had abus'd it; whereas the Stage, he could not but know, was generally allow'd, when rightly conducted, to be a delightful Method of mending our Morals? *For that Reason*, (reply'd *Hains* :) *Collier is, by Profession, a Moral mender himself, and two of Trade, you know, can never agree.*

The Authors of the *Old Batchelor*, and of the *Relapse*, were those, whom *Collier* most labour'd to convict of Immorality; to which they severally publish'd their Reply. The first seem'd too much hurt, to be able to defend himself; and the other felt him so little, that his Wit only laugh'd at his Lashes.

My first Play, of the *Fool in Fashion*, too, being then in a course of Success; perhaps for that Reason, only, this severe Author thought himself oblig'd to attack it; in which, I hope, he has shown more Zeal, than Justice. His greatest Charge against it is, That it sometimes uses the Word, *Faith*, as an Oath, in the Dialogue: But if *Faith* may as well signify our given Word, or Credit, as our Religious Belief, why might not his Charity have taken it, in the less Criminal Sense? Nevertheless, *Mr. Collier's* Book, was, upon the whole, thought so laudable a Work, that *King William*, soon after it was publish'd, granted him a *Nolo prosequi*, when he stood answerable to the Law, for his having absolv'd two Criminals, just before they were executed for High Treason. And it must be farther granted, that his calling our Dramatick Writers to this strict account, had a very wholesome Effect, upon those, who writ after this time. They were, now, a great deal more upon their Guard; Indecencies were no longer Wit; and, by degrees, the Fair Sex came

P 2

again

again to fill the Boxes, on the first Day of a new Comedy, without Fear or Censure. But the Master of the Revels, who then, licens'd all Plays, for the Stage, assisted this Reformation, with a more zealous Severity, than ever. He would strike out whole Scenes of a vicious, or immoral Character, tho' it were visibly shewn to be reform'd, or punish'd. A severe Instance of this Kind falling upon myself, may be an Excuse for my relating it. When *Richard the Third* (as I alter'd it from *Shakespeare*) came from his Hands, to the Stage, he expung'd the whole First Act, without sparing a Line of it. This extraordinary Stroke of a *Steale*, occasioned my applying to him, for the small Indulgence of a Speech, or two, that the other four Acts might limp on, with a little less Absurdity. No, he had not Leisure to consider what might be separately inoffensive. He had an Objection to the whole Act, and the Reason he gave for it was, that the Distresses of *King Henry the Sixth*, who is kill'd by *Richard* in the first Act, would put weak People too much in mind of *King James*, then living in *France*; a notable Proof of his Zeal for the Government! Those who have read, either the Play, or the History, I dare say, will think he strain'd hard for the Parallel. In a word, we were forc'd, for some few Years, to let the Play take its Fate, with only four Acts divided into five; by the Loss of so considerable a Limb, may one not modestly suppose, it was robb'd of, at least, a fifth part of that Favour, it afterwards met with? For tho' this first Act was at last recovered, and made the Play whole again; yet the Relief came too late, to repay me for the pains I had taken in it. Nor did I ever hear that this zealous Severity of the Master of the Revels, was afterwards thought justifiable. But my Good-fortune, in process of Time, gave me an Opportunity to talk with my Oppressor, in my Turn.

The Patent granted by his late Majesty King *George I.* to *Richard Steele*, and his Assigns, of which I was one, made us sole Judges of what Plays might be proper for the Stage, without submitting them, to the  
 Approbation,

Approbation, or License of any other particular Person. Notwithstanding which, the Master of the Revels demanded his Fee of Forty Shillings, upon our acting a new One, tho' we had spar'd him the Trouble of perusing it. This occasion'd my being deputed to him, to enquire into the Right of his Demand, and to make an amicable End of our Dispute. I confess, I did not dislike the Office; and told him, according to my Instructions, That I came not to defend, even our own Right, in prejudice to his; that if our Patent, had inadvertently superseded the Grant of any former Power, or Warrant, whereon he might ground his Pretensions, we would not insist upon our Broad Seal, but would readily answer his Demands upon sight of such his Warrant, any thing in our Patent to the contrary notwithstanding. This I had reason to think he could not do; and, when I found he made no direct Reply to my Question, I repeated it with greater Civilities, and offers of Compliance, 'till I was forc'd in the end to conclude, with telling him, That as his Pretensions were not back'd with any visible Instrument of Right, and as his strongest Plea was Custom, we could not so far extend our Complaisance, as to continue his Fees upon so slender a Claim to them: And from that Time, neither our Plays, or his Fees, gave either of us any farther trouble. In this Negotiation, I am the bolder to think Justice was on our Side, because the Law lately pass'd, by which the Power of Licensing Plays, &c. is given to a proper Person, is a strong Presumption, that no law had ever given that Power to any such Person before.

My having mentioned this Law, which so immediately affected the Stage, inclines me to throw out a few Observations upon it: But I must first lead you gradually thro' the Facts, and natural Causes, that made such a Law necessary.

Although it had been taken for granted, from Time immemorial, that no Company of Comedians, could act Plays, &c. without the Royal Licence, or Protection of some legal Authority; a Theatre was, notwithstanding, erected in *Goodman's-Fields*, about seven



162 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

Years ago, where Plays, without any such Licence were acted for some time, unmolested, and with Impunity. After a Year or two, this Playhouse was thought a Nuisance too near the City: Upon which the Lord-Mayor, and Aldermen, petition'd the Crown to suppress it: What Steps were taken, in favour of that Petition, I know not, but common Fame seem'd to allow from what had, or had not been done in it, that acting Plays in the said Theatre was not evidently unlawful. However, this Question of acting without a Licence, a little time after, came to a nearer Decision in *Westminster-Hall*; the Occasion of bringing it thither was this: It happened that the Purchasers of the Patent, to whom Mr. Booth and myself had sold our Shares, were at variance with the Comedians, that were then left to their Government, and the Variance ended, in the chief of those Comedians deserting, and setting up for themselves in the little House in the *Hay-Market*, in 1733 by which Desertion the Patentees were very much distressed, and considerable Losers. Their Affairs being in this desperate Condition, they were advi'd, to put the act of the Twelfth of Queen *Anne*, against Vagabonds, in force, against these Deserters, then acting in the *Hay-Market* without Licence. Accordingly, one of their chief Performers was taken from the Stage, by a Justice of Peace his Warrant, and committed to *Bridewell* as one within the Penalty of the said Act. When the Legality of this Commitment was disputed in *Westminster-Hall*, by all I could observe, from the Learned Pleadings on both Sides (for I had the Curiosity to hear them) it did not appear to me, that the Comedian, so committed, was within the Description of the said Act. he being a House-keeper, and having a Vote for the *Westminster* Members of Parliament. He was discharged accordingly, and conducted through the Hall, with the Congratulations of the Crowds that attended, and wish'd well to his Cause.

The Issue of this Trial threw me, at that time, into a very odd Reflexion, *viz.* That if acting Plays, without Licence, did not make the Performers Vagabonds,

bonds, unless they wandered from their Habitations so to do, how particular was the Case of Us three late Managing Actors, at the *Theatre-Royal*, who in twenty Years before had paid, upon an Averidge, at least Twenty Thousand Pounds, to be protected (as Actors) from a Law, that has not since appeared to be against us. Now, whether we might certainly have acted without any Licence at all, I shall not pretend to determine; but this I have, of my own Knowledge, to say, That in Queen *Anne's* Reign, the Stage was in such Confusion, and its Affairs in such Distress, that Sir *John Vanbrugh*, and Mr. *Congreve*, after they had held it about one Year, threw up the Management of it, as an unprofitable post, after which, a Licence for acting was not thought worth any Gentleman's asking for, and almost seem'd to go a begging, till some time after, by the Care, Application, and Industry of three Actors, it became so prosperous, and the Profits so considerable, that it created a new place, and a *Sinecure* of a Thousand Pounds a Year, which the Labour of those Actors constantly paid, to such Persons as had from time to time, Merit or Interest enough, to get their Names inserted as Fourth Managers in a Licence with them, for acting Plays, &c. a preferment, that many a Sir *Francis Wronghead* would have jump'd at. But to go on with my Story. This Endeavour of the Patentees, to suppress the Comedians acting in the *Hay Market*, proving ineffectual, and no Hopes of a Re-union then appearing, the Remains of the Company left in *Drury-Lane*, were reduced to a very low Condition. At this time a third purchaser, *Charles Fleetwood*, Esq; slept in; who judging the best Time to buy was, when the Stock was at the lowest price, struck up a Bargain at once, for Five parts in Six of the Patent; and, at the same time, gave the revolted Comedians their own Terms to return, and come under his Government in *Drury-Lane*, where they now continue to act, at very ample Salaries, as I am informed, in 1738. But (as I have observ'd) the late Cause of the prosecuted Comedian having gone so strongly in his Favour, and the House in *Goodman's-Fields*

## 164 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

*Fields* too, continuing to act with an little Authority, unmolested; these so tolerated Companies gave Encouragement to a broken Wit, to collect a fourth Company, who, for some time acted Plays in the *Hay-Market*, which House the united *Drury-Lane* Comedians had lately quitted: This enterprising Person, I say (whom I do not chuse to name, unless it could be to his advantage, or that it were of Importance) had Sense enough to know, that the best Plays, with bad Actors, would turn but to a very poor account; and therefore found it necessary to give the publick some pieces of an extraordinary Kind, the poetry of which he conceiv'd ought to be so strong, that the greatest Dunce of an Actor could not spoil it: He knew too, that as he was in haste to get Money, it would take up less Time to be intrepidly abusive, than decently entertaining; that, to draw the Mob after him, he must rake the Channel, and pelt their Superiors; that, to shew himself somebody, he must come up to *Juvenal's* Advice, and stand the Consequence:

*Aude aliquid brevibus Gyaris, et carcere dignum  
Si vis esse aliquis*—— Juv. Sat. I.

Such then, was the mettlesome Modesty he set out with; upon this principle he produc'd several frank, and free Farces, that seem'd to knock all Distinctions of Mankind on the Head: Religion, Laws, Government, Priests, Judges, and Ministers, were all laid flat, at the Feet of this *Herculean* Satyrist! This *Draw-cansir* in Wit, that spared neither Friend nor Foe! who, to make his poetical Fame immortal, like another *Erastratus*, set Fire to his Stage, by writing up to an Act of Parliament to demolish it. I shall not give the particular Strokes of his Ingenuity a Chance to be remembred, by reciting them; it may be enough to say, in general Terms, they were so openly flagrant, that the Wisdom of the Legislature thought it high time, to take a proper Notice of them.

Having

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 165

Having now shewn, by what means there came to be four Theatres, besides a fifth for Operas, in *London*, all open at the same time, and that while they were so numerous, it was evident some of them must have starv'd, unless they fed upon the Trash and Filth of Buffoonery, and Licentiousness; I now come, as I promis'd, to speak of that necessary Law, which has reduced their Number, and prevents the Repetition of such Abuses, in those that remain open, for the publick Recreation.

While this Law was in Debate, a lively Spirit, and uncommon Eloquence was employ'd against it. It was urg'd, That *one* of the greatest Goods we can enjoy, is *Liberty*. (This we may grant to be an incontestable Truth, without its being the least Objection to this Law.) It was said too, That to bring the Stage under the Restraint of a Licencer, was leading the way to an attack, upon the Liberty of the Press. This amounts but to a Jealousy at best, which I hope, and believe all honest *Englishmen* have as much Reason to think as groundless, as to fear, it is a just Jealousy; For the Stage, and the Press, I shall endeavour to shew, are very different Weapons to wound with. If a great Man could be no more injured, by being personally ridicul'd, or made contemptible, in a Play, than by the same Matter only printed, and read against him, in a Pamphlet, or the strongest Verse; then indeed the Stage, and the Press might pretend, to be upon an equal Foot of Liberty: But when the wide Difference between these two Liberties comes to be explain'd, and consider'd, I dare say we shall find the Injuries from one, capable of being ten times more severe, and formidable, than from the other: Let us see, at least, if the Case will not be vastly alter'd. Read what Mr. Collier, in his *Defence of his Short View of the Stage*, &c. page 25, says to this point; he sets this Difference, in a clear Light. These are his Words:

“ The

166 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

“ The Satyr of a Comedian, and another Poet have  
 “ a different effect upon Reputation : A Character of  
 “ Disadvantage, upon the Stage, makes a stronger  
 “ Impression, than elsewhere : Reading is but Hear-  
 “ ing at second hand ; now Hearing, at best, is a  
 “ more languid Conveyance, than Sight. For as  
 “ *Horace* observes,

*Segnius irritant animum, demissa per aurem,  
 Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus.*

“ The Eye is much more affecting, and strikes deeper  
 “ into the Memory, than the Ear : Besides, upon  
 “ the Stage, both the Senses are in Conjunction. The  
 “ Life of the Actor fortifies the Object, and awakens  
 “ the Mind to take hold of it—Thus a dramatic abuse  
 “ is riveted, in the Audience ; a Jest is improv'd into  
 “ argument, and Rallying grows up into Reason :  
 “ Thus a Character of Scandal becomes almost indeli-  
 “ ble ; a Man goes for a Blockhead, upon *Content*,  
 “ and he that is made a Fool in a Play is often made  
 “ one for his Life. 'Tis true, he passes for such only  
 “ among the prejudic'd, and unthinking ; but these  
 “ are no inconsiderable Division of Mankind. For  
 “ these Reasons, I humbly conceive, the Stage stands  
 “ in need of a great deal of Discipline, and Restraint :  
 “ To give them an unlimited Range, is in effect to  
 “ make them Masters of all moral Distinctions, and  
 “ to lay Honour and Religion, at their Mercy. To  
 “ shew Greatness ridiculous, is the way to lose the Use,  
 “ and abate the Value of the Quality. Things made  
 “ little in jest, will soon be so in earnest ; for Laugh-  
 “ ing, and Esteem, are seldom bestow'd on the same  
 “ Object.”

If this was Truth, and Reason (as sure it was) forty Years ago ; will it not carry the same Conviction with it to these Days, when there came to be a much stronger Call for a Reformation of the Stage, than when this Author wrote against it, or perhaps than was ever known, since the *English* Stage had a Being ? And now let us ask another Question ! Does not the gene-



general Opinion of Mankind suppose, that the Honour, and Reputation of a Minister is, or ought to be, as dear to him, as his Life? Yet when the Law, in Queen Anne's Time, had made even an unsuccessful attempt upon the Life of a Minister, capital, could any Reason be found, that the Fame, and Honour of his Character should not be under equal Protection? Was the Wound that *Guiscard* gave to the late Lord *Oxford*, when a Minister, a greater Injury, than the Theatrical Insult which was offer'd to a later Minister, in a more valuable Part, his Character? Was it not as high time, then, to take this dangerous Weapon of mimical Insolence, and Defamation out of the Hands of a mad Poet, as to wrest the Knife from the lifted Hand of a Murderer? And is not that Law of a milder Nature, which prevents a Crime, than that which punishes it, after it is committed? May not one think it amazing, that the Liberty of defaming lawful power and dignity, should have been so eloquently contended for? or especially that this Liberty ought to triumph in a Theatre, where the most able, the most innocent, and most upright Person, must himself be, while the wound is given, defenceless? How long must a Man so injur'd, lie bleeding, before the pain and anguish of his Fame (if it suffers wrongfully) can be dispell'd? or say, he had deserv'd Reproof, and publick Accusation, yet the Weight and Greatness of his Office, never can deserve it from a publick Stage, where the lowest Malice by sawcy Parallels, and abusive Inuendoes, may do every thing but name him: But alas! Liberty is so tender, so chaste a Virgin, that, it seems, not suffer her to do irreparable Injuries, with Impunity, is a Violation of her! It cannot sure be a principle of Liberty, that would turn the Stage into a Court of Enquiry, that would let the partial applauses of a vulgar Audience give Sentence upon the Conduct of Authority, and put Impeachments into the Mouth of a *Harlequin*? Will not every impartial Man think, that Malice, Envy, Faction, or Mis-rule, might have too much Advantage over lawful Power, if the Range of such a Stage-liberty were unlimited, and insisted on to be

be enroll'd among the glorious Rights of an *English* Subject?

I remember much such another ancient Liberty, which many of the good People of *England* were once extremely fond of; I mean that of throwing Squibs, and Crackers, at all Spectators without distinction, upon a Lord-Mayor's Day; but about forty Years ago a certain Nobleman happening to have one of his Eyes burnt out by this mischievous Merriment, it occasion'd a penal Law to prevent those Sorts of Jest, from being laugh'd at for the future: Yet I have never heard, that the most zealous Patriot ever thought such a Law was the least Restraint upon our Liberty.

If I am ask'd, why I am so voluntary a Champion for the Honour of this Law, that has limited the Number of Play-Houses, and which now can no longer concern me, as a professor of the Stage? I reply, that it being a Law, so nearly relating to the Theatre, it seems not at all foreign to my History, to have taken notice of it; and as I have farther promis'd, to give the publick a true portrait of my Mind, I ought fairly to let them see how far I am, or am not a Block-head, when I pretend to talk of serious Matters, that may be judg'd so far above my Capacity: Nor will it in the least discompose me, whether my Observations are contemn'd, or applauded. A Blockhead is not always an unhappy Fellow, and if the World will not flatter us, we can flatter ourselves; perhaps too it will be as difficult to convince us, we are in the wrong, as that you wiser Gentlemen are one Tittle the better for your Knowledge. It is yet a Question, with me, whether we weak Heads have not as much pleasure too, in giving our shallow Reason a little Exercise, as those clearer Brains have, that are allow'd to dive into the deepest Doubts and Mysteries; to reflect, or form a Judgment upon remarkable things *past*, is as delightful to me, as it is to the gravest Politician to penetrate into what is *present*, or to enter, into Speculations upon what is, or is not likely to come. Why are Histo-

ries written, if all Men are not to judge of them ? Therefore, if my Reader has no more to do, than I have, I have a Chance for his being as willing to have a little more upon the same Subject, as I am to give it him.

When direct Arguments against this Bill were found too weak, Recourse was had to diffusive ones : It was said, that *this Restraint upon the Stage, would not remedy the Evil complain'd : That a Play refus'd to be licens'd, would still be printed, with double Advantage, when it should be insinuated, that it was refus'd, for some Strokes of Wit, &c. and would be more likely, then, to have its Effect, among the People.* However natural this Consequence may seem, I doubt it will be very difficult, to give a *printed* Satyr, or Libel, half the Force, or Credit of an *acted* one. The most artful, or notorious Lye, or strain'd Allusion that ever slander'd a great Man, may be read, by some People, with a Smile of Contempt, or at worst, it can impose but on one Person at once : But when the Words of the same plausible Stuff, shall be repeated on a Theatre, the Wit of it among a Crowd of Hearers, is liable to be over-valu'd, and may unite, and warm a whole Body of the Malicious, or Ignorant, into a Plaudit : nay, the partial Claps of only *twenty* ill-minded Persons, among several hundreds of silent Hearers, shall, and often have been, mistaken for a general Approbation, and frequently draw into their Party the Indifferent, or Inapprehensive, who rather, than be thought not to understand the Conceit, will laugh, with the Laughers, and join in the Triumph ! But alas ! the *quiet* Reader of the same ingenious Matter, can only like for *himself* ; and the Poison has a much slower Operation, upon the Body of a People, when it is so retail'd out, than when sold to a full Audience by wholesale. The *single* Reader too may happen to be a sensible, or unprejudic'd Person ; and then the merry Dose meeting with the Antidote of a sound Judgment, perhaps may have no Operation at all : With such a one, the Wit of the most ingenious Satyr, will only, by its

Q

intrin-

intrinsic Truth, or Value, gain upon his Approbation; or if it be worth an Answer, a printed Falshood, may possibly be confounded by printed Proofs against it. But against Contempt, and Scandal heighten'd, and colour'd by the Skill of an *Actor*, ludicrously infusing it into a Multitude, there is no immediate Defence to be made, or equal Reparation to be had for it; for it would be but a poor Satisfaction, at last, after lying long patient, under the Injury, that Time only is to shew (which would probably be the Case) that the Author of it was a desperate Indigent, that did it for Bread. How much less dangerous, or offensive, then, is the *written*, than the *acted* Scandal? The Impression the Comedian gives to it, is a kind of double Stamp upon the Poet's Paper, that raises it to ten times the intrinsic Value. Might we not strengthen this Argument too, even by the Eloquence, that seem'd to have oppos'd this Law? I will say for my self, at least, that when I came to read the printed Arguments against it, I could scarce believe they were the same, that had amaz'd, and rais'd such Admiraton, in me, when they had the Advantage of a lively Elocution, and of that Grace and Spirit, which gave Strength and Lustre to them, in the Delivery!

Upon the whole; if the Stage ought ever to have been reform'd; if to place a Power *somewhere* of restraining its Immoralities, was not inconsistent, with the Liberties of a civiliz'd People (neither of which, sure any moral Man of Sense can dispute) might it not have shewn a Spirit too poorly prejudic'd, to have rejected so rational a Law, only because, the Honour, and Office of a Minister might happen, in some small Measure, to be protected by it.

But however little Weight there may be, in the Observations I have made upon it, I shall for my own Part always think them just; unless I should live to see (which I do not expect) some future Set of upright Ministers use their utmost Endeavours to repeal it.

And

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 171

And now, we have seen the Consequence of what many People are apt to contend for, Variety of Play-houses ! How was it possible so many could honestly subsist, on what was fit to be seen ? Their extraordinary Number, of Course, reduc'd them to live upon the Gratification of such hearers, as they knew would be best pleas'd with publick Offence ; and publick Offence, of what kind soever, will always be a good Reason for making Laws, to restrain it.

To conclude, let us now consider this Law, in a quite different Light ; let us leave the political Part of it quite out of the Question ; what Advantage could either the Spectators of Plays, or the Masters of Play-houses have gain'd, by its having never been made ? How could the same Stock of Plays supply four Theatres, which (without such additional Entertainments, as a Nation of common Sense ought to be ashamed of) could not well support two ? Satiety must have been the natural Consequence, of the same Plays being twice as often repeated, as now they need be ; and Satiety puts an end to all Tastes, that the Mind of Man can delight in. Had therefore, this Law been made seven Years ago, I should not have parted with my Share in the Patent, under a thousand Pounds more, than I receiv'd for it——— So that as far as I am able to judge, both the Publick, as Spectators, and the Patentees, as Undertakers, are, or might be, in a way of being better entertain'd, and more considerable Gainers by it.

I now return to the State of the Stage, where I left it, about the Year 1697. from whence this pursuit of its Immoralities, has led me farther, than I first design'd to have follow'd it.



## C H A P. IX.

*A small Apology, for writing on. The different State of the two Companies. Wilks invited over from Dublin. Estcourt, from the same Stage, the Winter following. Mrs. Oldfield's first Admission to the Theatre-Royal. Her Character. The great Theatre in the Hay-Market built, for Betterton's Company. It answers not their Expectation. Some Observations upon it. A Theatrical State Secret.*

**I** NOW begin to doubt, that the *Gazetè du Cœur*, in which I first undertook this Work, may have drawn me, into a more laborious Amusement, than I shall know how to away with: For though I cannot say, I have yet jaded my Vanity, it is not impossible but, by this time, the most candid of my Readers may want a little Breath; especially, when they consider, that all this Load, I have heap'd upon their patience, contains but seven Years of the forty three I pass'd upon the Stage; the History of which Period I have enjoyn'd myself to transmit to the Judgment (or Oblivion) of Posterity. However, even my Dulness will find somebody to do it right; if my Reader is an ill-natur'd one, he will be as much pleas'd to find me a Duncè in my old Age, as possibly he may have been, to prove me a brisk Blockhead, in my Youth: But if he has no Gall to gratify, and would (for his simple Amusement) as well know, how the Play-houses went on forty Years ago, as how they do now, I will honestly tell him the rest of my Story, as well as I can. Lest therefore, the frequent Digressions, that have broke in, upon it, may have entangled his Memory, I must beg leave, just to throw together the Heads of what I have already given him, that he may again recover the Clue of my Discourse.

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 173

Let him, then, remember, from the Year 1660 to 1684, the various Fortune of the (then) King's, and Duke's, two famous Companies; their being reduc'd to one united; the distinct Characters I have given of thirteen Actors, which in the Year 1690 were the most famous, then, remaining of them; the Cause of their being again divided in 1695, and the Consequences of that Division, 'till 1697; from whence I shall lead them to our second Union in — Hold! let me see — ay, it was in that memorable Year, when the two Kingdoms of England and Scotland were made one. And I remember a particular, that confirms me I am right in my Chronology; for the Play of *Hamlet* being acted soon after *Effcourt*, who then took upon him to say any thing, added a fourth Line to *Shakespeare's* Prologue to the Play, in that Play, which originally consisted but of three, but *Effcourt* made it run thus:

*For Us, and for our Tragedy,  
Thus stooping to your Clemency,  
[This being a Year of Unity.]  
We beg your Hearing patiently.*

This new Chronological Line coming unexpectedly upon the Audience, was receiv'd with Applause, tho' several grave Faces look'd a little out of Humour at it. However, by this Fact, it is plain our Theatrical Union happen'd in 1708. But to speak of it, in its place, I must go a little back again.

From 1697, to this Union, both 'Companies went on, without any memorable Change in their Affairs, unless it were that *Betterton's* People (however good in their Kind) were most of them too far advanc'd in Years to mend; and tho' we, in *Drury-lane*, were too young to be excellent, we were not too old to be better. But what will not Satietie depreciate? For though I must own, and avow, that in our highest Prosperity, I always thought we were greatly their Inferiors; yet, by our good Fortune of being seen in quite new Lights, which several new-written Plays had shewn us in, we now began to make a considerable

174 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

Stand against them. One good new Play, to a rising Company, is of inconceivable Value. In *Oronoko* (and why may I not name another, tho' it be my own?) in *Love's last Shift*, and in the Sequel of it, the *Relapse*; several of our People shew'd themselves in a new Style of Acting, in which Nature had not as yet been seen. I cannot here forget a Misfortune that beset our Society, about this time, by the Loss of a young Actor, *Hildebrand Hor den*, who was kill'd at the Bar of the *Rose Tavern*, in a frivolous, rash, accidental Quarrel; for which a late Resident at *Venice*, Colonel *Burgess*, and several other Persons of Distinction, took their Trials, and were acquitted. This young Man had almost every natural Gift, that could promise an excellent Actor; he had besides, a good deal of Table-wit, and Humour, with a handsome person, and was every Day rising into publick Favour. Before he was bury'd, it was observable, that two or three Days together, several of the Fair Sex, well dress'd, came in Masks (then frequently worn) and some in their own Coaches, to visit this Theatrical Heroe, in his Shroud. He was the e'der Son of Dr. *Hor den*, Minister of *Twickenham*, in *Middlesex*. But this Misfortune was soon repair'd, by the Return of *Wilks*, from *Dublin* (who upon this young Man's Death, was sent for over) and liv'd long enough among us to enjoy that Approbation, from which the other was so unhappily cut off. The Winter following, *Estcourt*, the famous Mimick, of whom I have already spoken, had the same Invitation from *Ireland*, where he had commenc'd Actor: His first part here, at the *Theatre Royal*, was the *Spanish Friar*, in which, tho' he had remembred every Look, and Motion of the late *Tony Leigh*, so far as to put the Spectator very much in mind of him; yet it was visible through the whole, notwithstanding his Exactness in the Out-lines, the true Spirit, that was to fill up the Figure, was not the same, but unskilfully dawb'd on, like a Child's painting upon the Face of a *Metzo-tinto*: It was too plain to the judicious, that the Conception was not his own, but imprinted in his

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 175

in his Memory, by another of whom he only presented a dead Likeness. But these were Defects, not so obvious to common Spectators ; no wonder, therefore, if by his being much sought after, in private Companies, he met with a sort of Indulgence, not to lay Partiality, for what he sometimes did upon the Stage.

In the Year 1699, Mrs. *Oldfield* was first taken into the House, where she remain'd about a Twelvemonth almost a Mute, and unheeded, 'till Sir *John Vanbrugh*, who first recommended her, gave her the Part of *A-linda*, in the *Pilgrim* revis'd. This gentle Character, happily became that want of Confidence, which is inseparable from young beginners, who without it, seldom arrive to any Excellence : Notwithstanding, I own I was, then, so far deceiv'd in my Opinion of her, that I thought, she had little more than her Person, that appear'd necessary to the forming a good Actress ; for she set out with so extraordinary a Diffidence, that it kept her too despondingly down, to a formal, plain (not to say) flat manner of speaking. Nor could the silver Tone of her Voice, 'till after some time, incline my Ear to any Hope in her favour. But Publick Approbation is the warm Weather of a Theatrical Plant, which will soon bring it forward, to whatever Perfection Nature has design'd it. However Mrs. *Oldfield* (perhaps for want of fresh Parts) seem'd to come but slowly forward, 'till the Year 1703. Our Company, that Summer, acted at the *Bath*, during the Residence of *Queen Anne* at that Place. At this time it happen'd, that Mrs. *Verbruggen*, by reason of her last Sickness (of which she some few Months after, dy'd) was left in *London* ; and though most of her Parts were, of course, to be dispos'd of, yet so earnest was the Female Scramble for them, that only one of them fell to the Share of Mrs. *Oldfield*, that of *Leonora*, in Sir *Courtly Nice* ; a Character of good plain Sense, but not over elegantly written. It was in this Part Mrs. *Oldfield* surpris'd me into an Opinion of her having all the innate Powers of a good Actress, though they were yet, but in the Bloom of what they promis'd.

Before

## 176 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

Before she had acted this Part, I had so cold an Expectation from her Abilities, that she could scarce prevail with me, to rehearse with her the Scenes, she was chiefly concern'd in, with *Sir Courty*, which I then acted. However, we ran them over, with a mutual Inadvertency of one another. I seem'd careless, as concluding, that any Assistance I could give her, would be to little, or no purpose; and she mutter'd out her Words in a sort of misty manner, at my low Opinion of her. But when the Play came to be acted, she had a just Occasion to triumph over the Error of my Judgment, by the (almost) Amazement that her unexpected Performance awak'd me to; so forward, and sudden a Step into Nature, I had never seen; and what made her performance more valuable, was, that I knew it all proceeded from her own Understanding, untaught, and unassisted by any one more experienc'd Actor. Perhaps it may not be unacceptable, if I enlarge a little more upon the Theatrical Character of so memorable an Actress.

Though this part of *Leonora*, in itself, was of so little value, that when she grew more into Esteem, it was one of the several she gave away, to inferior Actresses; yet it was the first (as I have observ'd) that corrected my Judgment of her, and confirm'd me, in a strong Belief, that she could not fail, in very little time, of being what she was afterwards allow'd to be, the foremost Ornament of our Theatre. Upon this unexpected Sally, then, of the Power, and Disposition, of so unforeseen an Actress, it was, that I again took up the two first Acts of the *Careless Husband*, which I had written the Summer before, and had thrown aside, in despair of having Justice done to the Character of *Lady Betty Modish*, by any one Woman, then among us; Mrs. *Verbruggen* being now in a very declining State of Health, and Mrs. *Bracegirdle* out of my Reach, and engag'd in another Company: But, as I have said, Mrs. *Oldfield* having thrown out such new Proffers of a Genius, I was no longer at a loss for Support; my Doubts were dispell'd, and I had now a new Call to finish it: Accordingly, the *Careless*  
*lest*



## The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c. 177

*his Husband* took its Fate upon the Stage, the Winter following, in 1704. Whatever favourable Reception, this Comedy has met with from the Publick; it would be unjust in me, not to place a large Share of it to the Account of Mrs. *Oldfield*; not only from the uncommon Excellence of her Action; but even from her personal manner of Converſing. There are many Sentiments in the Character of *Lady Betty Modish*, that I may almost ſay, were originally her own, or only dress'd with a little more Care, than when they negligently fell, from her lively Humour: Had her Birth plac'd her in a higher Rank of Life, she had certainly appear'd, in reality, what in this Play she only, excellently, acted, an agreeably gay Woman of Quality, a little too conscious of her natural Attractions. I have often ſeen her, in private Societies, where Women of the best Rank might have borrow'd some part of her Behaviour, without the least Diminution of their Sense, or Dignity. And this very Morning, where I am now writing at the *Bath*, November 11, 1738, the same Words were ſaid of her, by a Lady of Condition, whose better Judgment of her personal Merit, in that light, has embolden'd me to repeat them. After her Success, in this Character of higher Life; and all that Nature had given her of the Actress, seem'd to have riſen to its full Perfection: But the Variety of her Power could not be known, 'till she was ſeen, in variety of Characters; which, as fast as they fell to her, she equally excell'd in. Authors had much more, from her Performance, than they had reason to hope for, from what they had written for her, and none had less than another, but as their Genius in the Parts they allotted her, was more or less elevated.

In the wearing of her Person, she was particularly fortunate; her Figure was always improving, to her Thirty-sixth Year; but her Excellence in acting was never at a stand: And the last new Character she shone in (*Lady Townly*) was a proof that she was still able to do more, if more could have been done for her. She had one Mark of good Sense, rarely known, in any Actor

178 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

Actor of either Sex, but herself. I have observ'd several, with promising Dispositions, very desirous of Instruction at their first setting out ; but no sooner had they found their least Account, in it, than they were, as desirous of being left to their own Capacity, which they, then, thought would be disgrac'd, by their seeming to want any farther Assistance. But this was not Mrs. Oldfield's way of thinking ; for to the last Year of her Life, she never undertook any Part she lik'd, without being importunately desirous of having all the Helps in it, that another could possibly give her. By knowing so much herself, she found how much more there was of Nature, yet needful to be known. Yet it was a hard matter to give her any Hint, that she was not able to take, or improve. With all this Merit, she was tractable, and less presuming, in her Station, than several, that had not half her pretensions to be troublesome : But she lost nothing by her easy Conduct ; she had every thing she ask'd, which she took care should be always reasonable, because she hated as much to be *grudg'd*, as *deny'd* a Civility. Upon her extraordinary Action in the *Provok'd Husband*, the Managers made her a Present of Fifty Guineas more than her Agreement, which never was more than a Verbal one ; for they knew she was above deserting them, to engage upon any other Stage, and she was conscious, they would never think it their Interest, to give her cause of Complaint. In the last two Months of her Illness, when she was no longer able to assist them, she declin'd receiving her Salary, tho' by her Agreement, she was entitled to it. Upon the whole, she was, to the last Scene she acted, the Delight of her Spectators : Why then may we not close her Character, with the same Indulgence with which *Horace* speaks of a commendable Poem :

*Ubi plura nitent—non ego paucis  
Offendor maculis—*

*Where in the whole, such various Beauties shine,  
'Twere idle, upon Errors, to refine.*

What

What more might be said of her as an Actress, may be found in the Preface to the *Provok'd Husband*; to which I refer the Reader.

With the Acquisition, then, of so advanc'd a Comedian as Mrs. *Olafield*, and the Addition of one so much in favour as *Wilks*, and by the visible Improvement of our other Actors, as *Penkethman*, *Johnson*, *Bullock*, and I think I may venture to name my self in the Number (but, in what Rank, I leave to the Judgment of those who have been my Spectators) the Reputation of our Company began to get ground; Mrs. *Oldfield*, and *Wilks*, by their frequently playing against one another, in our best Comedies, very happily supported that Humour, and Vivacity, which is so peculiar to our *English* Stage. The *French*, our only modern Competitors, seldom give us their Lovers, in such various Lights: In their Comedies (however lively a People they are by nature) their Lovers are generally constant, simple Sighers, both of a Mind, and equally distress'd, about the Difficulties of their coming together; which naturally makes their Conversation so serious, that they are seldom good Company to their Auditors: And tho' I allow them many other Beauties, of which we are too negligent; yet our Variety of Humour has Excellencies that all their valuable Observation of Rules have never yet attain'd to. By these Advantages, then, we began to have an equal Share of the politer sort of Spectators, who, for several Years, could not allow our Company to stand in any comparison, with the other. But Theatrical Favour, like publick Commerce, will sometimes deceive the best Judgments, by an unaccountable change of its Channel; the best Commodities are not always known to meet with the best Markets. To this Decline of the Old Company, many Accidents might contribute; as the too distant Situation of their Theatre; or their want of a better, for it was not, then, in the condition it now is; but small, and poorly fitted up, within the Walls of a Tennis *Quare* Court, which is of the lesser sort. *Booth*, who was then a young Actor, among them, has often told me of the Difficulties *Betterton*, then, labour'd

labour'd under, and complain'd of : How impracticable he found it, to keep their Body to that common Order, which was necessary for their Support ; of their relying too much upon their intrinsick Merit ; and though but few of them were young, even when they first became their own Masters, yet they were all now, ten years older, and consequently more lyable to fall into an inactive Negligence, or were only separately diligent, for themselves, in the sole Regard of their Benefit-Plays ; which several of their Principals knew, at worst, would raise them Contributions, that would more than tolerably subsist them, for the current Year. But as these were too precarious Expedients, to be always depended upon, and brought in nothing, to the general Support of the Numbers, who were at Salaries under them ; they were reduc'd to have recourse to foreign Novelties ; *L'Abbè, Balon, and Mademoiselle Subligny*, three of the, then, most famous Dancers of the *French Opera*, were, at several times, brought over at extraordinary Rates, to revive that sickly Appetite, which plain Sense, and Nature had satiated. But alas ! there was no recovering to a sound Constitution, by those mere costly Cordials ; the Novelty of a Dance, was but of a short Duration, and perhaps hurtful, in its consequence ; for it made a Play, without a Dance, less endur'd, than it had been before, when such Dancing was not to be had. But perhaps, their exhibiting these Novelties, might be owing to the Success we had met with, in our more barbarous introducing of *French Mimicks, and Tumblers* the Year before ; of which *Mr. Rowe*, thus complains in his Prologue to one of his first Plays :

*Must Shakespear, Fletcher, and laborious Ben,  
Be left for Scaramouch, and Harlequin ?*

While the Crowd, therefore, so fluctuated, from one House, to another, as their Eyes were more, or less regaled, than their Ears, it could not be a Question much in Debate, which had the better Actors ; the Merit of

of either, seem'd to be of little moment ; and the Complaint in the foregoing Lines, tho' it might be just, for a time, could not be a just one for ever ; because the best Play that ever was writ, may tire by being too often repeated, a Misfortune naturally attending the Obligation, to play every Day ; not that whenever such Satiety commences, it will be any Proof of the Play's being a bad one, or of its being ill acted. In a word Satiety is, seldom, enough consider'd, by either Criticks, Spectators, or Actors, as the true, not to say just, Cause of declining Audiences, to the most rational Entertainments : And tho' I cannot say, I ever saw a good new Play, not attended with due Encouragement, yet to keep a Theatre daily open, without sometimes giving the Publick a bad old one, is more than, I doubt, the Wit of human Writers, or Excellence of Actors, will ever be able to accomplish. And, as both Authors, and Comedians, may have often succeeded, where a sound Judgment would have condemn'd them, it might puzzle the nicest Critick living, to prove in what sort of Excellence, the true Value of either consisted : For, if their Merit were to be measur'd by the full Houses, they may have brought ; if the Judgment of the Crowd were infallible ; I am afraid we shall be reduc'd to allow, that the *Beggars Opera* was the best written Play, and Sir *Harry Wildair* (as *Wilks*, play'd it) was the best acted Part, that ever our *English* Theatre had to boast of. That Critick indeed, must be rigid, to a Folly, that would deny either of them, their due Praise, when they severally drew such Numbers after them ; all their Hearers could not be mistaken ; and yet, if they were all, in the right, what sort of Fame will remain to those celebrated Authors, and Actors, that had so long, and deservedly been admired, before these were in Being. The only Distinction I shall make between them is, That to write, or act, like the Authors, or Actors of the latter end of the last Century, I am of Opinion, will be found a far better Pretence to Success, than to imitate those who have been so crowded to, in the beginning of this. All I



would infer from this Explanation, is, that though we had, then, the better Audiences, and might have more of the young World on our Side; yet this was no sure Proof, that the other Company were not, in the Truth of Action, greatly our Superiors. These elder Actors, then, besides the Disadvantages I have mention'd, having only the fewer, true Judges to admire them, naturally wanted the Support of the Crowd, whose Taste was to be pleas'd at a cheaper Rate, and with coarser Fare. To recover them therefore, to their due Estimation, a new Project was form'd, of building them a stately Theatre, in the *Hay Market*, by Sir *John Vanbrugh*, for which he rais'd a Subscription of thirty Persons of Quality, at one hundred Pounds each, in Consideration whereof every Subscriber, for his own Life, was to be admitted, to whatever Entertainments should be publickly perform'd there, without farther Payment for his Entrance. Of this Theatre, I saw the first Stone laid, on which was inscrib'd *The little Whig*, in Honour to a Lady of extraordinary Beauty, then the celebrated Toast, and Pride of that Party.

In the Year 1706, when this House was finish'd, *Betterton*, and his Co-partners dissolv'd their own Agreement, and threw themselves under the Direction of Sir *John Vanbrugh*, and Mr. *Congreve*; imagining, perhaps, that the Conduct of two such eminent Authors, might give a more prosperous Turn to their Condition; that the Plays, it would, now, be their Interest, to write for them, would soon recover the Town to a true Taste, and be an Advantage, that no other Company could hope for; that in the Interim till such Plays could be written, the Grandeur of their House, as it was a new Spectacle, might allure the Crowd to support them: But if these were their Views, we shall see, that their Dependence upon them, was too sanguine. As to their Prospect of new Plays, I doubt it was not enough consider'd, that good ones were Plants of a slow Growth; and though Sir *John Vanbrugh* had a very quick Pen, yet Mr. *Congreve* was too judicious a Writer, to let any thing come hastily  
out

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c. 183*

out of his Hands ; As to their other Dependence, the House they had not yet discover'd, that almost every proper Quality, and Convenience of a good Theatre had been sacrific'd, or neglected, to shew the Spectator a vast, triumphal Piece of Architecture! And that the best Play, for the Reasons I am going to offer, could not but be under greater Disadvantages, and be less capable of delighting the Auditor, here, than it could have been in the plain Theatre they came from. For what could their vast Columns, their gilded Cornices, their immoderate high Roofs avail, when scarce one Word in ten, could be distinctly heard in it? Nor had it then, the Form, it now stands in, which Necessity, two or three Years after reduc'd it to: At the first opening it, the flat Cieling, that is now over the Orchestra, was then a Semi-oval Arch, that sprung fifteen Feet higher from above the Cornice: The Cieling over the Pit too, was still more rais'd, being one level Line from the highest back part of the upper Gallery, to the Front of the Stage: The Front-boxes were a continued Semicircle, to the bare Walls of the House on each Side: This extraordinary, and superfluous Space occasion'd such an Undulation, from the Voice of every Actor, that generally what they said sounded like the Gabbling of so many People, in the lofty Isles in a Cathedral--- The Tone of a Trumpet, or the Swell of an Eunuch's holding Note, 'tis true, might be sweeten'd, by it; but the articulate Sounds of a speaking voice were drown'd, by the hollow Reverberations of one Word upon another. To this Inconvenience, why may we not add that of its Situation: for at that time it had not the Advantage of almost a large City, which has since been built, in its Neighbourhood: Those costly Spaces of *Hanover*, *Grosvenor*, and *Cavendish* Squares, with the many, and great adjacent Streets about them, were then all but so many green Fields of Pasture, from whence they could draw little, or no Sustenance, unless it were that of a Milk-Diet. The City, the Inns of Court, and the middle Part of the Town, which were the more constant Support

of a Theatre, and chiefly to be rely'd on, were now, too far, out of the Reach of an easy Walk; and Coach-hire is often too hard a Tax, upon the Pit, and Gallery. But from the vast Increase of the Buildings I have mention'd, the Situation of that Theatre has since that Time receiv'd considerable Advantages; a new World of People of Condition are nearer to it, than formerly, and I am of Opinion, that if the Auditory Part were a little more reduc'd to the Model of that in *Drury-Lane*, an excellent Company of Actors would, now, find a better Account in it, than in any other House in this Populous City: Let me not be mistaken, I say, an excellent Company, and such as might be able to do Justice to the best of Plays, and throw out those latent Beauties in them, which only excellent Actors can discover, and give Life to. If such a Company were now there, they would meet with a quite different Set of Auditors, than other Theatres have lately been us'd to: Polite Hearers would be content with polite Entertainments; and I remember the time, when Plays, without the Aid of Farce, or Pantomime, were as decently attended as Opera's, or private Assemblies, where a noisy Sloven would have pass'd his time as uneasily, in a Front-box, as in a Drawing-room; when a Hat upon a Man's Head there would have been look'd upon, as a sure Mark of a Brute, or a Booby: But of all this I have seen too, the Reverse, where in the presence of Ladies, at a Play, common Civility has been set at defiance, and the Privilege of being a rude Clown even to a Nuisance, has, in a manner been demanded, as one of the Rights of *English Liberty*: Now, though I grant, that Liberty is so precious a Jewel, that we ought not to suffer the least Ray of its Lustre, to be diminish'd; yet methinks the Liberty of seeing a Play, in quiet, has as laudable Claim to Protection, as the Privilege of not suffering you to do it, has to Impunity. But since we are so happy, as not to have a certain Power among us, which, in another Country is call'd the *Police*, let us rather bear this In-sult, than buy its Remedy at too dear a Rate; and  
let

## The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c. 185

let it be the Punishment of such wrong-headed Savages, that they never will, or can know the true Value of that Liberty, which they so stupidly abuse: Such vulgar Minds possess their Liberty, as profligate Husbands do fine Wives, only to disgrace them. In a Word, when Liberty boils over, such is the Scum of it. But to our new erected Theatre.

Not long before this Time, the *Italian* Opera began first to steal into *England*: but in as rude a Disguise, and unlike itself, as possible; in a lame, hobbling Translation into our own Language, with false Quantities, or Metre out of Measure, to its original Notes, sung by our own unskillful Voices, with Graces misapply'd to almost every Sentiment, and with Action, lifeless and unmeaning, through every Character: The first *Italian* Performer, that made any distinguish'd Figure in it, was *Valentini*, a true sensible Singer, at that time, but of a Throat too weak, to sustain those melodious Warblings, for which the fairer Sex have since idoliz'd his Successors. However, this Defect was so well supply'd by his Action, that his Hearers bore with the Absurdity of his Singing his first Part of *Turnus* in *Camilla*, all in *Italian*, while every other Character was sung and recited to him in *English*. This I have mention'd to shew not only our Tramontane Taste, but that the crowded Audiences, which follow'd it to *Drury-Lane*, might be another Occasion of their growing thinner in *Lincoln-Inn-Fields*.

To strike in, therefore, with this prevailing Novelty, Sir *John Vanburgh*, and Mr. *Congreve*, open'd their new *Hay Market Theatre*, with a translated Opera, to *Italian* Musick, call'd the *Triumph of Love*, but this not having in it, the Charms of *Camilla*, either from the Inequality of the Musick, or Voices, had but a cold Reception, being perform'd but three Days, and those not crowded. Immediately upon the Failure of this Opera, Sir *John Vanburgh* produc'd his Comedy call'd the *Confederacy*, taken (but greatly improv'd) from the *Bourgeois à la mode* of *Dancour*: Though the Fate of this Play was something better,

yet I thought, it was not equal to its Merit: For it is written with an uncommon Vein of Wit and Humour; which confirms me, in my former Observation, that the difficulty of hearing distinctly in that, then wide Theatre, was no small Impediment to the Applause, that might have follow'd the same Actors in it, upon any other Stage; and indeed every Play acted there, before the House was alter'd, seem'd to suffer, from the same Inconvenience: In a Word, the Prospect of Profits, from this Theatre was so very barren, that Mr. Congreve, in a few Months gave up his Share, and Interest in the Government of it, wholly to Sir John Vanburgh. But Sir John being sole Proprietor of the House, was at all Events, oblig'd to do his utmost to support it. As he had a happier Talent of throwing the *English* Spirit, into his Translation of *French* Plays, than any former Author, who had borrow'd from them, he, in the same Season, gave the Publick three more of that kind, call'd the *Cuckold in Conceit*; from the *Cocu imaginaire* of *Moliere*; *Squire Trelooby*, from his *Monfieur de Pourceaugnac*, and the *Mistake*, from the *Dépit Amoureux* of the same Author. Yet all these, however, well executed, came to the Ear in the same undistinguish'd Utterance, by which almost all their Plays had equally suffer'd: For what few could plainly hear, it was not likely a great many could applaud.

It must farther be consider'd too, that this Company were, not now, what they had been, when they first revolted from the Patentees in *Drury-Lane*, and became their own Masters, in *Lincolns-Inn-Fields*. Several of them, excellent, in their different Talents, were now dead; as *Smith*, *Kynaston*, *Sandford*, and *Leigh*: Mrs. *Betterton*, and *Underhill* being, at this time, also superannuated Pensioners, whose Places were generally but ill supply'd: Nor could it be expected that *Betterton* himself, at past seventy, could retain his former Force, and Spirit; though he was yet far distant from any Competitor. Thus then were these Remains of the best Set of Actors, that I believe were



were ever known, at once, in *England*, by Time, Death, and the Satiety of their Hearers mould'ring to decay.

It was, now, the Town-talk, that nothing but a Union of the two Companies could recover the Stage, to its former Reputation, which Opinion was certainly true: One would have thought too, that the Patentee of *Drury-Lane* could not have fail'd to close with it, he being, then, on the prosperous Side of the Question, having no Relief to ask for himself, and little more to do in the Matter, than to consider what he might safely grant: But it seems this was not his way of counting: he had other Persons, who had great Claims to Shares, in the Profits of this Stage, which Profits, by a Union, he foresaw would be too visible, to be doubted of, and might raise up a new Spirit, in those Adventurers, to revive their Suits at Law with him; for he had led them a Chace in Chancery several Years, and when they had driven him, into a Contempt of that Court, he conjur'd up a Spirit, in the Shape of six and eight Pence-a-day, that constantly struck the Tipstaff blind, whenever he came near him: He knew the intrinsick Value of Delay, and was resolv'd to stick to it, as the surest way to give the Plaintiffs enough on't. And by this Expedient our good Master had long walk'd about, at his Leisure, cool, and contented, as a Fox, when the Hounds were drawn off, and gone home from him. But whether I am right, or not, in my Conjectures, certain it is, that this close Master of *Drury-Lane*, had no Inclination to a Union, as will appear by the Sequel.

Sir *John Vanburgh* knew too, that to make a Union worth his while, he must not seem too hasty for it; he therefore found himself under a Necessity, in the mean time of letting his whole Theatrical Farm to some industrious Tenant, that might put it into better Condition. This is that Crisis, as I observ'd, in the eight Chapter, when the Royal License, for acting Plays, &c. was judg'd of so little Value, as not to have one Suitor for it. At this Time then, the  
Master

288 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

Master of *Drury-Lane* happen'd to have a sort of premier Agent in his Stage-Affairs, that seem'd in Appearance as much to govern the Master, as the Master him'self did to govern his Actors: But this Person was under no Stipulation, or Salary, for the Service he render'd; but had gradually wrought himself into the Master's extraordinary Confidence, and Trust, from an habitual Intimacy, a cheerful Humour, and an indefatigable Zeal for his Interest. If I should farther say, that this Person has been well known in almost every Metropolis, in *Europe*; that few private Men have, with so little Reproach, run through more various Turns of Fortune; that on the wrong Side of Three score, he has yet the open Spirit of a hale young Fellow of five and twenty; that though he still chuses to speak what he thinks, to his best Friends, with an undisguis'd Freedom, he is, notwithstanding acceptable to many Persons of the first Rank, and Condition; that any one of them (provided he likes them) may now send him, for their Service, to *Constantinople*, at half a Day's Warning; that Time has not yet, been able to make a visible Change, in any Part of him, but the Colour of his Hair, from a fierce coal-black, to that of a milder milk-white: When I have taken this Liberty with him, methinks it cannot be taking a much greater, if I at once should tell you, that this Person was Mr. *Owen Saviney*, and that it was to him Sir *John Vanburgh*, in this Exigence of his Theatrical Affairs, made an Offer of his Actors, under such Agreements of Salary, as might be made with them; and of his House, Cloaths, and Scenes, with the Queen's License to employ them, upon Payment of only the casual Rent of five Pounds, upon every acting Day, and not to exceed 700*l.* in the Year. Of this Proposal, Mr. *Saviney* desir'd a Day, or two to consider; for however he might like it, he would not meddle in any sort, without the Consent, and Approbation of his Friend, and Patron, the Master of *Drury-Lane*. Having given the Reasons why this Patentee was averse to a Union, it may now seem less a Wonder, why he immediately consented that

*Saviney*

## *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c. 189*

*Saviney* should take the *Hay-Market* House, &c. and continue that Company to act against him; but the real Truth was, that he had a mind both Companies should be clandestinely under one, and the same Interest; and yet in so loose a manner, that he might declare his Verbal Agreement with *Saviney* good, or null, and void, as he might best find his Account in either. What flatter'd him, that he had this wholesome Project, and *Saviney* to execute it, both in his Power, was, that at this time, *Saviney* happen'd to stand in his Books, Debtor to Cash, upwards of Two Hundred Pounds: But here, we shall find, he over-rated his Security. However *Saviney* as yet follow'd his Orders; he took the *Hay-Market* Theatre, and had farther, the private Consent of the Patentee, to take such of his Actors from *Drury-Lane*, as either from Inclination or Discontent, might be willing to come over to him, in the *Hay-Market*. The only one he made an Exception of, was my self: For tho' he chiefly depended upon his Singers, and Dancers, he said, it would be necessary to keep some one tolerable Actor with him, that might enable him to set those Machines a going. Under this Limitation, of not entertaining me, *Saviney* seem'd to acquiesce, 'till after he had open'd, with the so recruited Company in the *Hay-Market*: the Actors that came to him from *Drury-Lane*, were *Wilks*, *Escourt*, *Mills*, *Keen*, *Johnson*, *Bullock*, *Mrs. Oldfield*, *Mrs. Rogers*, and some few others of less note: But I must here let you know, that this Project was form'd, and put in Execution, all in very few Days, in the Summer-Season, when no Theatre was open. To all which I was entirely a Stranger, being at this time at a Gentleman's House in *Gloucestershire*, scribbling, if I mistake not, the *Wife's Resentment*.

The first Word I heard of this Transaction, was by a Letter from *Saviney*, inviting me to make One in the *Hay-Market* Company, whom he hop'd I could not but now think the stronger Party. But, I confess, I was not a little alarm'd, at this Revolution: For I consider'd, that I knew of no visible Fund to support these

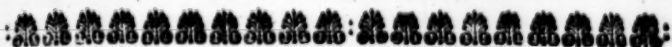
these Actors, but their own Industry ; that all his Recruits from *Drury-Lane* would want new Cloathing; and that the warmest Industry would be always labouring up Hill, under so necessary an Expence, so bad a Situation, and so inconvenient a Theatre. I was always of Opinion too, that in changing Sides, in most Conditions, there generally were discovered more unforeseen Inconveniencies, than visible Advantages; and that at worst, there would always some sort of Merit remain with Fidelity, tho' unsuccessful. Upon these Considerations, I was only thankful for the Offers made me, from the *Hay-Market*, without accepting them ; and soon after came to Town towards the usual time of their beginning to act, to offer my Service to our old Master. But I found our Company so thinn'd, that it was almost impracticable, to bring any one tolerable Play upon the Stage. When I ask'd him, where were his Actors, and in what manner he intended to proceed: he reply'd, *Don't you trouble your self, come along, and I'll shew you.* He then led me about all the By-places in the House, and shew'd me fifty little Back-doors, dark Closets and narrow Passages, in Alterations and Contrivances of which kind he had busied his Head, most part of the Vacation ; for he was scarce ever, without some notable Joyner, or a Bricklayer extraordinary, in pay, for twenty Years. And there are so many odd obscure Places about a Theatre, that his Genius in Nook-building was never out of Employment ; nor could the most vain-headed Author, be more deaf to an Interruption in reciting his Works, than our wise Master was, while entertaining me with the Improvements he had made in his invisible Architecture ; all which, without thinking any one part of it necessary ; tho' I seem'd to approve, I could not help, now and then, breaking in, upon his Delight, with the impertinent Question of ——— *But, Master, where are your Actors ?* But it seems I had taken a wrong time for this sort of Enquiry ; his Head was full of Matters of more moment (and, as you find) I was to come another time for an Answer : A very hopeful Condition  
I found

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 191

I found myself in, under the Conduct of so profound a Virtuoso, and so considerate a Master! But, to speak of him seriously, and to account for this Disregard to his Actors, his Notion was, that Singing, and Dancing, or any sort of exotick Entertainments, would make an ordinary Company of Actors too hard, for the best Set, who had only plain Plays to subsist on. Now, tho' I am afraid too much might be said, in favour of this Opinion, yet I thought he laid more Stress upon that Sort of Merit, than it would bear; as I therefore found myself of so little Value with him, I could not help setting a little more upon myself, and was resolv'd to come to a short Explanation with him. I told him, I came to serve him, at a time, when many of his best Actors had deserted him; that he might now have the Refusal of me; but I could not afford to carry the Compliment so far, as to lessen my Income by it; that I therefore expected, either my casual Pay to be advanced, or the Payment of my former Salary made certain, for as many Days, as we had acted the Year before.——No, he was not willing to alter his former Method; but I might chuse whatever Parts I had a mind to act, of theirs who had left him. When I found him, as I thought, so insensible, or impregnable, I look'd gravely in his Face, and told him—He knew upon what Terms, I was willing to serve him; and took my leave. By this Time, the *Hay Market* Company had begun acting, to Audiences something better than usual, and were all paid their full Salaries, a Blessing they had not felt, in some Years, in either House before. Upon this Success, *Swiney* press'd the Patentee to execute the Articles they had as yet only verbally agreed on, which were in Substance, That *Swiney* should take the *Hay-Market* House in his own Name, and have what Actors he thought necessary from *Drury-Lane*, and after all Payments punctually made, the Profits should be equally divided between these two Undertakers. But soft, and fair! Rashness was a Fault, that had never yet been imputed to the Patentee; certain Payments were Methods he had not of a long, long time



time been us'd to; that Point still wanted time for Consideration. But *Swinney* was as hasty, as the other was slow, and was resolv'd to know what he had to trust to, before they parted; and to keep him the closer, to his Bargain, he stood upon his Right of having *Me* added to that Company, if I was willing to come into it. But this was a Point as absolutely refus'd on one side, as insisted on, on the other. In this Contest, high Words were exchang'd on both Sides, 'till, in the End, this their last private Meeting came to an open Rupture: But before it was publickly known, *Swinney*, by fairly letting me into the whole Transaction, took effectual Means to secure me in his Interest. When the Mystery of the Patentee's Indifference to me was unfolded, and that his slighting me, was owing, to the Security he rely'd on, of *Swinney's* not daring to engage me, I could have no further Debate with myself, which side of the Question I should adhere to. To conclude, I agreed, in two Words, to act with *Swinney*; and from this Time, every Change that happen'd in the Theatrical Government, was a nearer Step to that twenty Years of Prosperity, which Actors, under the Management of Actors, not long afterwards, enjoy'd. What was the immediate Consequence of this last Desertion from *Drury-Lane*, shall be the Subject of another Chapter.



C H A P. X.

*The recruited Actors, in the Hay-Market, encourag'd by a Subscription. Drury-Lane, under a particular Management. The Power of a Lord-Chamberlain, over the Theatres, consider'd. How it had been formerly exercis'd. A Digression to Tragick Authors.*

HAVING shewn the particular Conduct of the Patentee, in refusing so fair an Opportunity of securing to himself both Companies, under his sole Power, and Interest; I shall now lead the Reader, after a short view of what pass'd in this new Establishment of the *Hay-Market Theatre*, to the Accidents, that the Year following, compell'd the same Patentee, to receive both Companies, united, into the *Drury-Lane Theatre*, notwithstanding his Disinclination to it.

It may, now, be imagin'd, that such a Detachment of Actors, from *Drury-Lane*, could not but give a new Spirit to those in the *Hay-Market*; not only by enabling them to act each others Plays to better advantage; but by an emulous Industry, which had lain too long inactive among them, and without which they plainly saw, they could not be sure of Subsistence. Plays, by this means began to recover a good Share of their former Esteem, and Favour; and the Profits of them, in about a Month, enabled our new Menager to discharge his Debt (of something more than Two Hundred Pounds) to his old Friend, the Patentee; who had now left him, and his Troop, in trust, to fight their own Battles. The greatest Inconvenience they still labour'd under, was the Immoderate Wideness of their House; in which, as I have observ'd, the Difficulty of Hearing, may be said to have bury'd half  
the

the Auditors Entertainment. This Defect seem'd evident, from the much better Reception several new Plays (first acted there) met with when they afterwards came to be played by the same Actors, in *Drury-Lane*: Of this Number were the *Stratagem*, and the *Wife's Resentment*; to which I may add, the *Double Gallant*. This last, was a Play made up of what little was tolerable, in two, or three others, that had no Success, and were laid aside, as so much Poetical Lumber; but by collecting and adapting the best Parts of 'em all, into one Play, the *Double Gallant* has had a Place, every Winter, amongst the Publick Entertainments, these Thirty Years. As I was only the Compiler of this Piece, I did not publish it in my own Name; but as my having but a Hand in it, could not be long a Secret. I have been often treated as a Plagiary on that Account: Not that I think I have any Right to complain, of whatever would detract from the Merit of that sort of Labour; yet, a Cobler may be allow'd to be useful, though he is not famous: And I hope a Man is not blameable for doing a little Good, tho' he cannot do as much as another? But so it is --- Twopenny Criticks must live, as well as Eighteenpenny Authors!

While the Stage was thus recovering its former Strength, a more honourable Mark of Favour was shewn to it, than it was ever known before, or since to have receiv'd. The, then, Lord *Hallifax*, was not only the Patron of the Men of Genius of this Time, but had likewise a generous Concern for the Reputation, and Prosperity of the Theatre, from whence the most elegant Dramatick Labours of the Learned, he knew, had often shone in their brightest Lustre. A Proposal therefore was drawn up, and address'd to that Noble Lord for his Approbation, and Assistance, to raise a publick Subscription for Reviving Three Plays of the best Authors, with the full Strength of the Company; every Subscriber to have Three Tickets, for the first Day of each Play, for his single Payment of Three Guineas. This Subscription his Lordship so zealously encourag'd, that from his Recommendation chiefly,

chiefly, in a very little time, it was compleated. The Plays were *Julius Cæsar* of *Shakespear*; the *King and no King* of *Fletcher*; and the Comic Scenes of *Dryden's Marriage à la mode*, and of his *Maiden Queen* put together, for it was judg'd, that as these comic Episodes were utterly independent of the serious Scenes, they were originally written to, they might on this Occasion be as well Episodes either to the other, and so make up five livelier Acts between them: At least the Project so well succeeded, that those comic Parts have never since been replac'd, but were continu'd to be jointly acted, as one Play, several Years after.

By the Aid of this Subscription, which happen'd in 1707, and by the additional Strength, and Industry of this Company, not only the Actors, (several of which were handsomely advanc'd, in their Salaries) were duly paid, but the Menager himself too, at the Foot of his Account stood a considerable Gainer.

At the same time, the Patentee of *Drury-Lane* went on in his usual Method of paying extraordinary Prices to Singers, Dancers, and other exotick Performers, which were as constantly deducted out of the sinking Salaries of his Actors: 'Tis true his Actors, perhaps, might not deserve much more, than he gave them; yet, by what I have related, it is plain he chose not to be troubled, with such, as visibly had deserved more: For it seems he had not purchas'd his share of the Patent, to mend the Stage, but to make Money of it: And to say Truth, his Sense of every thing to be shewn there, was much upon a Level, with the Taste of the Multitude, whose Opinion, and whose Money weigh'd with him full as much, as that of the best Judges. His Point was to please the Majority, who, could more easily comprehend any thing they saw, than the daintiest things, that could be said to them. But in this Notion he kept no medium; for in my Memory, he carry'd it so far, that he was (some few Years before this time) actually dealing for an extraordinary large Elephant, at a certain Sum, for every Day he might think fit to shew the tractable Genius

of that vast quiet Creature, in any Play, or Farce, in the Theatre (then standing) in *Dorset-Garden*. But from the Jealousy, which so formidable a Rival had rais'd in his Dancers, and by his Bricklayer's assuring him, that if the Walls were to be open'd wide enough for it's Entrance, it might endanger the fall of the House, he gave up his Project, and with it, so hopeful a Prospect of making the Receipts of the Stage run higher than all the Wit, and Force of the best Writers had ever yet rais'd them to.

About the same time of his being under this Disappointment, he put in practice another Project of a new, though not of so bold a Nature; which was his introducing a Set of Rope-dancers, into the same Theatre; for the first Day of whose Performance, he had given out some Play, in which, I had a material Part: But I was hardy enough to go into the Pit, and acquainted the Spectators near me, that I hop'd, they would not think it a Mark of my Disrespect to them, if I declin'd acting upon any Stage, that was brought to so low a Disgrace, as ours was like to be by that Day's Entertainment. My Excuse was so well taken, that I never after found any ill Consequences, or heard of the least Disapprobation of it; and the whole Body of Actors too, protesting against such an Abuse of their Profession, our cautious Master was too much alarm'd, and intimidated to repeat it.

After what I have said, it will be no Wonder, that all due Regards to the original Use, and Institution of the Stage, should be utterly lost, or neglected: Nor was the Conduct of this Menager easily to be alter'd, while he had found the Secret of making Money, out of Disorder and Confusion: For however strange it may seem, I have often observ'd him inclin'd to be chearful, in the Distresses of his Theatrical Affairs, and equally reserv'd and pensive, when they went smoothly forward with a visible Profit. Upon a Run of good Audiences, he was more frighted to be thought a Gainer, which might make him accountable to others, than he was dejected with bad Houses, which



at worst, he knew would make others accountable to him: And as, upon a moderate Computation, it cannot be suppos'd, that the contested Accounts of a twenty Years Wear and Tare, in a Play-house, could be fairly adjusted by a Master in Chancery, under four-score Years more, it will be no Surprize, that by the Neglect, or rather the Discretion of other Proprietors, in not throwing away good Money after bad, this Hero of a Menager, who alone supported the War, should in time so fortify himself by Delay, and so tire his Enemies, that he became sole Monarch of his Theatrical Empire, and left the quiet Possession of it, to his Successors.

If these Facts seem too trivial for the Attention of a sensible Reader, let it be consider'd, that they are not chosen Fictions, to *entertain*, but Truths necessary to *inform* him, under what low Shifts, and Disgraces, what Disorders and Revolutions the Stage labour'd, before it could recover that Strength, and Reputation, wherewith it began to flourish, towards the latter End of *Queen Anne's* Reign; and which it continu'd to enjoy, for a Course of twenty Years following. But let us resume our Account of the new Settlement, in the *Hay-Market*.

It may be a natural Question, why the Actors, whom *Swiny* brought over to his Undertaking, in the *Hay-Market*, would tie themselves down to limited Salaries? for though he, as their Menager was oblig'd to make them certain Payments, it was not certain that the Receipts would enable him to do it; and since their own Industry was the only visible Fund they had to depend upon, why would they not, for that Reason, insist upon their being Sharers as well of possible Profits, as Losses? How far in this Point, they acted right, or wrong, will appear from the following State of their Case.

It must first be consider'd, that this Scheme of their Desertion, was all concerted, and put in execution in a Week's Time, which short warning might make them overlook that Circumstance, and the sudden Prospect of being deliver'd from having seldom

more, than half their Pay was a Contentment that had bounded all their farther Views. Besides, as there could be no room to doubt of their receiving their full Pay, previous to any Profits, that might be reap'd by their Labour, and as they had no great Reason to apprehend those Profits could exceed their respective Salaries, so far as to make them repine at them, they might think it but reasonable, to let the Chance of any extraordinary Gain to be on the Side of their Leader, and Director. But farther, as this Scheme had the Approbation of the Court, these Actors, in reality, had it not, in their Power to alter any Part of it. And what Indue'd the Court to encourage it, was, that by having the Theatre, and its Menager more immediately dependent on the Power of the Lord Chamberlain, it was not doubted but the Stage would be recovered into such a Reputation, as might now do Honour, to that absolute Command, which the Court, or its Officers seem'd always fond of having over it.

Here, to set the Constitution of the Stage in a clear Light, it may not be amiss, to look back a little on the Power of a Lord Chamberlain, which, as may have been observ'd, in all Changes of the Theatrical Government, has been the main Spring without which no Scheme, of what kind soever, could be set in Motion. My Intent is not to enquire how far, by Law, this Power has been limited, or extended: but merely as an Historian, to relate Facts, to gratify the Curious, and then leave them to their own Reflections: This, too, I am the more inclin'd to, because there is no one Circumstance, which has affected the Stage, wherein so many Spectators, from those of the highest Rank, to the Vulgar, have seem'd more positively knowing, or less inform'd in.

Though in all the Letters Patent, for acting Plays, &c. since *K. Charles the First's* Time, there has been no mention of the Lord Chamberlain, or of any Subordination to his Command, or Authority-- yet it was still taken for granted, that no Letters Patent, by the

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 199

the bare Omission of such a great Officer's Name, could have superseded, or taken out of his Hands, that Power, which Time out of Mind, he always had exercis'd over the Theatre. The common Opinions then abroad were, that if the Profession of Actors was unlawful, it was not in the Power of the Crown to license it; and, if it were not unlawful, it ought to be free, and independent, as other Professions; and that a Patent to exercise it, was only an honorary Favour, from the Crown, to give it a better Grace of Recommendation to the Publick. But as the Truth of this Question seem'd to be wrapt in a great deal of Obscurity, in the old Laws made in former Reigns, relating to Players, &c. it may be no Wonder, that the best Companies of Actors should be desirous of taking Shelter under the visible Power of a Lord Chamberlain, who they knew had, at his Pleasure, favour'd, and protected, or born hard upon them: But be all this as it may, a Lord Chamberlain (from whencesoever his Power might be deriv'd) had, till of later Years, had always an implicit Obedience paid to it: I shall now give some few Instances, in what manner it was exercis'd.

What appear'd to be most reasonable, under his Cognizance was the licensing, or refusing new Plays, or striking out what might be thought offensive in them: Which Province had been, for many Years, assign'd to his inferior Officer, the Master of the Revels; yet was not this License irrevocable; for several Plays, though acted, by that Permission, had been silenced afterwards. The first Instance of this kind, that common Fame has delivered down to us, is that of the *Maid's Tragedy* of Beaumont and Fletcher, which was forbid in King Charles the Second's time, by an Order from the Lord Chamberlain. For what Reason this Interdiction was laid upon it, the Politicks of those Days, have only left us to guess. Some said, that the killing of the King, in that Play, while the tragical death of King Charles the First, was then so fresh in People's Memory, was an Object too horribly impious, for a publick Entertainment. What makes

100 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

makes this Conjecture seem to have some Foundation, is that the celebrated *Waller*, in Compliment to that Court, alter'd the last Act of this Play (which is printed at the End of his Works) and gave it a new Catastrophe, wherein the Life of the King is loyally sav'd, and the Lady's Matter made up, with a less terrible Reparation. Others have given out, that a repenting Mistress, in a romantick Revenge of her Dishonour, killing the King, in the very Bed he expected her to come into, was shewing a too dangerous Example to other *Evadnes*, then shining at Court, in the same Rank of royal Distinction; who, if ever their Consciences should have run equally mad, might have had frequent Opportunities of putting the Expiation of their Frailty, into the like Execution. But this I doubt is too deep a Speculation, or too ludicrous a Reason; to be rely'd on; it being well known, that the Ladies, then in favour, were not so nice, in their Notions, as to think their Preferment their Dishonour, or their Lover a Tyrant: Besides, that easy Monarch lov'd his Roses, without Thorns; nor do we hear, that he much chose, to be himself the first Gatherer of them.

The *Lucius Junius Brutus* of *Nat. Lee*, was, in the same Reign, silenc'd after the third Day of acting it; it being objected that the Plan, and Sentiments of it had too boldly vindicated, and might enflame Republican Principles.

A Prologue (by *Dryden*) to the *Prophetess*, was forbid by the Lord *Dorset*, after the first Day of its being spoken. This happen'd when King *William* was prosecuting the War, in *Ireland*. It must be confess'd, that this Prologue had some familiar, metaphorical Sneers, at the Revolution itself; and as the Poetry of it was good, the Offence of it was less pardonable.

The Tragedy of *Mary Queen of Scotland*, had been offer'd to the Stage twenty Years before it was acted: But from the profound Penetration of the Master of the Revels, who saw political Spectres in it, that never appear'd in the Presentation, it had lain, so long upon the Hands of the Author; who had at last, the

the good Fortune to prevail with a Nobleman, to favour his Petition to Queen *Anne*, for Permission to have it acted: The Queen had the Goodness to refer the Merit of his Play, to the Opinion of that noble Person, although he was not her Majesty's Lord Chamberlain; upon whose Report of its being, every way, an innocent Piece, it was soon after acted with Success.

Reader, by your Leave---- I will but just speak a Word, or two to any Author, that has not yet writ one Line of his next Play, and then I will come to my point again--- What I would say to him, is this--- Sir, before you set Pen to Paper, think well, and principally of your Design, or chief action, towards which every Line you write ought to be drawn, as to its Centre: If we can say of your finest Sentiments, This, or That might be left out, without maiming the Story you would tell us, depend upon it, that fine thing is said in a wrong Place: and though you may urge, that a bright Thought is not to be resisted, you will not be able to deny, that those very fine Lines would be much finer, if you could find a proper Occasion for them: Otherwise you will be thought to take less Advice from *Aristotle*, or *Horace*, than from Poet *Bays* in the *Rehearsal*, who very smartly says--- *What the Devil is the Plot good for, but to bring in fine things?* Compliment the Taste of your Hearers, as much as you please with them, provided they belong to your Subject, but don't like a dainty Preacher, who has his Eye more upon this World, than the next, leave your text for them. When your Fable is good, every part of it will cost you much less Labour, to keep your Narration alive, than you will be forced to bestow upon those elegant Discourses, that are not absolutely conducive to your Catastrophe, or main Purpose: Scenes of that kind, shew but at best, the unprofitable or injudicious Spirit of a Genius. It is but a melancholy Commendation of a fine Thought, to say, when we have heard it, *Well! but what's all this to the Purpose?* Take therefore in some part, Example by the Author last mention'd! There are three Plays of his,



his, *The Earl of Essex*, *Anne Bullen*, and *Mary Queen of Scots*, which tho' they are all written in the most barren, barbarous Style, that was ever able to keep possession of the Stage, have all interested the Hearts of his Auditors. To what then could this Success be owing, but to the intrinsic, and naked Value of the well-conducted Tales, he has simply told us? There is something so happy in the Disposition of all his Fables; all his chief Characters are thrown into such natural Circumstances of Distress, that their Misery, or Affliction wants very little Assistance from the Ornaments of Stile, or Words to speak them. When a skilful Actor is so situated, his bare plaintive Tone of Voice, the Cast of Sorrow from his Eye, his slowly graceful Gesture, his humble Sighs of Resignation under his Calamities: All these, I say, are sometimes without a Tongue, equal to the strongest Eloquence. At such a time, the attentive Auditor supplies from his own Heart, whatever the Poet's Language may fall short of, in Expression, and melts himself into every Pang of Humanity, which the like Misfortunes in real Life could have inspir'd.

And what I have observ'd, whenever I see a Tragedy defective in its Fable, let there be never so many fine Lines it; I hope I shall be forgiven, if I impute that Defect, to the Idleness, the weak Judgment, or barren Invention of the Author.

If I should be ask'd, why I have not always, myself, follow'd the Rules I would impose upon others; I can only answer, that whenever I have not, I lie equally open to the same critical Censure. But having often observ'd a better than ordinary Stile thrown away, upon the loose, and wandering Scenes of an ill chosen Story, I imagin'd these Observations might convince some future Author, of how great Advantage a Fable well plann'd must be to a Man of any tolerable Genius.

All this, I own, is leading my Reader out of the way; But if he has as much Time upon his Hands, as I have, (provided we are neither of us tir'd) it may be equally to the Purpose, what he reads, or what

I write

I write of. But as I have no Objection to Method, when it is not troublesome, I return to my Subject.

Hitherto we have seen no very unreasonable Instance of this absolute Power of a Lord Chamberlain, though we were to admit, that no one knew of any real Law, or Construction of Law, by which this power was given him. I shall now offer some Facts relating to it of a more extraordinary Nature, which I leave my Reader to give a Name to.

About the middle of King *William's* Reign, an Order of the Lord Chamberlain was, then, subsisting, that no Actor of either Company, should presume to go from one, to the other, without a Discharge from their respective Menagers, and the Permission of the Lord Chamberlain. Notwithstanding such Order, *Powel* being uneasy, at the Favour, *Wilks*, was then rising into, had without such Discharge, left the *Drury Lane Theatre*, and engag'd himself to that of *Lincolns-Inn-Fields*: but by what follows, it will appear, that this Order was not so much intended, to do both of them good, as to do, that which the Court chiefly favour'd (*Lincolns-Inn Fields*) no harm. For when *Powel* grew dissatisfy'd at his Station there too, he return'd to *Drury Lane* (as he had before gone from it) without a Discharge: But halt a little! here, on this side of the Question, the Order was to stand, in force, and the same Offence against it now, was not to be equally pass'd over. He was the next Day taken up by a Messenger, and confin'd to the Porter's Lodge, where, to the best of my Remembrance, he remain'd about two Days; when the Menagers of *Lincolns-Inn-Fields*, not thinking an Actor of his loose Character worth their farther Trouble, gave him up; though perhaps he was releas'd, for some better Reason. Upon this Occasion, the next Day, behind the Scenes, at *Drury Lane*, a Person of great Quality, in my hearing, enquiring of *Powel*, into the Nature of his Offence, after he had heard it, told him, That if he had had Patience, or Spirit enough, to have staid in his

Con-

Confinement, till he had given him Notice of it, he would have found him a handsomer way of coming out of it.

Another Time the same Actor, *Powel*, was provok'd at *Will's* Coffee-house, in a Dispute about the Play-house Affairs, to strike a Gentleman, whose Family had been sometimes masters of it; a Complaint of this Insolence was, in the Absence of the Lord Chamberlain, immediately made to the Vice-Chamberlain, who so highly resented it, that he thought himself bound in Honour, to carry his power of redressing it, as far as it could possibly go: For *Powel* having a part in the Play, that was acted the Day after; the Vice-Chamberlain sent an Order to silence the whole Company, for having suffer'd *Powel* to appear upon the Stage, before he had made that Gentleman Satisfaction, although the Masters of the Theatre had had no Notice of *Powel's* Misbehaviour: However, this Order was obey'd, and remain'd in force for two or three Days, till the same Authority was pleas'd or advis'd, to revoke it. From the Measures this injur'd Gentleman took for his Redress, it may be judg'd how far it was taken for granted, that a Lord Chamberlain had an absolute Power over the Theatre.

I shall now give an Instance of an Actor, who had the Resolution to stand upon the Defence of his Liberty, against the same Authority, and was reliev'd by it.

In the same King's Reign, *Dogget*, who though, from a severe Exactness in his Nature, he could be seldom long easy in any Theatre, where Irregularity not to say Injustice, too often prevail'd, yet in the private Conduct of his Affairs, he was a prudent, honest Man. He therefore took an usual Care, when he return'd to act under the Patent, in *Drury-Lane*, to have his Articles drawn firm and binding: But having some Reason to think the Patentee had not dealt fairly with him, he quieted the Stage, and would act no more, rather chusing to lose his whatever unsatisfy'd, Demands, than go through the chargeable,

chargeable, and tedious Course of the Law to recover it. But the Patentee, who (from other People's Judgment) knew the Value of him, and who wanted too, to have him sooner back, than the Law could possibly bring him, thought the surer way would be, to desire a shorter Redress from the Authority of the Lord Chamberlain. Accordingly upon his Complaint, a Messenger was immediately dispatch'd to *Norwich*, where *Dogget* then was, to bring him up, in Custody: But doughty *Dogget*, who had money in his Pocket, and the Cause of Liberty at his Heart, was not, in the least, intimidated, by this formidable Summons. He was observ'd to obey it, with a particular Chearfulness, entertaining his fellow Traveller, the Messenger, all the way in the Coach (for he had protested against riding) with as much Humour, as a Man of his Business might be capable of tasting. And as he found his Charges were to be defray'd, he, at every Inn, call'd for the best Dainties the Country could afford, or a pretended weak Appetite could digest. At this Rate they jollily roll'd on, more with the Air of a Jaunt, than a Journey, or a party of Pleasure, than of a poor Devil in durance. Upon his arrival in Town, he immediately apply'd to the Lord Chief Justice *Holt*, for his *Habeas Corpus*. As his Case was something particular, that eminent, and learned Minister of the Law took a particular Notice of it: For *Dogget* was not only discharg'd, but the Process of his Confinement (according to common Fame) had a Censure pass'd upon it, in Court, which I doubt, I am not Lawyer enough to repeat! To conclude, the officious Agents in this Affair finding, that, in *Dogget*, they had mistaken their Man, were mollify'd into milder proceedings, and (as he afterwards told me) wisper'd something, in his Ear, that took away *Dogget's* farther Uneasiness about it.

By these Instances we see how naturally Power only founded on Custom, is apt, where the Law is silent, to run into Excesses, and while it laudably pretends to govern others, how hard it is to govern itself. But since the Law has lately open'd its Mouth,

and has said plainly, that some part of this Power to govern the Theatre shall be, and is plac'd in a proper Person; and as it is evident, that the power of that white Staff, ever since it has been in the noble Hand, that now holds it, has been used with the utmost Lenity, I would beg leave of the murmuring Multitude, who frequent the Theatre, to offer them a simple Question or two, *viz.* Pray Gentlemen, how came you, or rather your Forefathers never to be mutinous, upon any of the occasional Facts I have related? And why have you been so often tumultuous, upon a Law's being made, that only confirms a less Power, than was formerly exercis'd, without any Law to support it? You cannot sure, say, such Discontent is either just, or natural, unless you allow it a Maxim in your Politicks, that power exercis'd *without* Law, is a less Grievance, than the same Power exercis'd *according* to law!

Having thus given the clearest View I was able, of the usual Regard paid to the Power of a Lord Chamberlain, the Reader will more easily conceive, what Influence, and Operation that Power must naturally have, in all Theatrical Revolutions; and particularly in the complete Re-union of both Companies, which happen'd in the Year following.



C H A P. XI.

*Some Chimerical Thoughts of making the Stage useful: Some, to its Reputation. The Patent unprofitable, to all the Proprietors, but one. A fourth Part of it given away to Colonel Brett. A Digression to his Memory. The two Companies of Actors re-united, by his Interest, and Menagement. The first Direction of Opera's only, given to Mr Swiney.*

FROM the Time, that the Company of Actors, in the Hay Market, was recruited with those from Drury-Lane, and came into the Hands of their new Director, Swiney, the Theatre for three or four Years following, suffer'd so many Convulsions, and was thrown every other Winter under such different Interests, and Menagement, before it came to a firm and lasting Settlement, that I am doubtful, if the most candid Reader will have Patience, to go through a full, and fair Account of it: And yet I would fain flatter my self, that those, who are not too wise, to frequent the Theatre (or have Wit enough to distinguish what sort of Sights there, either do Honour, or Disgrace to it) may think their national Diversion no contemptible Subject, for a more able Historian, than I pretend to be: If I have any particuler Qualification, for the Task, more than another, it is that I have been an ocular Witness of the several Facts, that are to fill up the rest of my Volume; and am, perhaps, the only Person living (however unworthy) from whom the same Materials can be collected; but let them come from whom they may, whether, at best, they will be worth reading; perhaps a Judgment may be better form'd after a patient Perusal of the following Digression.

208 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

In whatever cold Esteem, the Stage may be, among the wise, and powerful; it is not so much a Reproach, to those, who contentedly enjoy it in its lowest Condition, as that Condition of it, is to those, who (though they cannot but know, to how valuable a publick Use, a Theatre, well establish'd, might be rais'd) yet in so many civiliz'd Nations, have neglected it. This perhaps will be call'd thinking my own wiser, than all the wise Heads, in *Europe*. But I hope a more humble Sense will be given to it; at least I only mean, that if so many Governments have their Reasons, for their Disregard of their Theatres, those Reasons may be deeper, than my Capacity has yet been able to dive into: If therefore my simple Opinion is a wrong one, let the Singularity of it expose me: And though I am only building a Theatre in the Air, it is there, however, at so little Expence, and in so much better a Taste, than any I have yet seen, that I cannot help saying of it, as a wiser man did (it may be) upon a wiser Occasion:

--- *Si quid novisti rectius istis,  
Candidus imperti, si non---*

Hor.

Give me leave to play, with my Project, in Fancy.

I say then, that as I allow nothing is more liable to debase and corrupt the Minds of a People, than a licentious Theatre: so under a just, and proper Establishment, it were possible to make it, as apparently the School of Manners, and of Virtue. Were I to collect all the Arguments, that might be given for my Opinion, or to enforce it by exemplary Proofs, it might swell this short Digression to a Volume; I shall therefore trust the Validity of what I have laid down, to a single Fact, that may be still fresh, in the Memory of many living Spectators. When the Tragedy of *Cato* was first acted, let us call to mind the noble Spirit of Patriotism, which that Play then infus'd into the Breasts of a free People, that crowd'd to it; with what affecting Force, was that most elevated of Human Virtues recommended? Even  
the

the false Pretenders to it felt an unwilling Conviction, and made it a Point of Honour to be foremost, in their Approbation ; and this too at a Time, when the fermented Nation had their different Views of Government. Yet the sublime Sentiments of Liberty in that venerable Character, rais'd in every sensible Hearer such conscious Admiration, such compell'd Assent to the Conduct of a suffering Virtue, as even demanded two almost irreconcilable Parties to embrace, and join in their equal Applauses of it. Now not to take from the Merit of the Writer, had that Play never come to the Stage, how much of this valuable Effect of it must have been lost ? It then could have had no more immediate Weight with the Publick, than our poring upon the many ancient Authors, through whose Works the same Sentiments have been, perhaps, less profitably dispers'd, tho' amongst Millions of Readers ; but by bringing such Sentiments to the Theatre, and into Action, what a superior Lustre did they shine with ? There *Cato* breath'd again in Life ; and tho' he perish'd in the Cause of Liberty, his Virtue was victorious, and left the Triumph of it in the Heart of every melting Spectator. If Effects like these, are laudable ; if the Representation of such Plays can carry Conviction with so much Pleasure, to the Understanding, have they not vastly the Advantage of any other human Helps to Eloquence ? What equal Method can be found to lead or stimulate the Mind, to a quicker Sense of Truth, and Virtue, or warm a People into the Love and Practice of such Principles, as might be at once a Defence, and Honour to their Country ? In what shape could we listen to Virtue with equal Delight or Appetite of Instruction ? The Mind of Man is naturally free, and when he is compell'd, or menac'd into any Opinion that he does not readily conceive, he is more apt to doubt the Truth of it, than when his Capacity is led by Delight into Evidence and Reason. To preserve a Theatre in this Strength, and Purity of Morals, is, I grant, what the wisest Nations, have not been able to perpetuate, or to transmit long to their Posterity : But

this Difficulty will rather heighten, than take from the Honour of the Theatre: The greatest Empires have decay'd, for want of proper Heads to guide them, and the Ruins of them sometimes have been the Subject of Theatres, that could not be, themselves exempt, from as various Revolutions: Yet may not the most natural Inference from all this be, That the Talents requisite to form good Actors, great Writers, and true Judges, were like those of wise and memorable Ministers, as well the Gifts of Fortune, as of Nature, and not always to be found, in all Climes or Ages. Or can there be a stronger modern Evidence of the Value of dramatick Performances, than that in many Countries, where the papal Religion prevails, the holy Policy (though it allows not to an Actor Christian Burial) is so conscious of the Usefulness of, his Art, it will frequently take in the Assistance of the Theatre, to give even Sacred History in a Tragedy, a Recommendation to the more pathetick Regard of their People. How can such Principles, in the Face of the World, refuse the Bones of a Wretch the lowest Benefit of Christian Charity, after having admitted his Profession (for which they deprive him of that Charity) to serve the solemn Purposes of Religion? How far then is this Religious Inhumanity short of that famous Painter's, who, to make his *Crucifix* a Master-piece of Nature, stabb'd the innocent Hireling, from whose Body he drew it; and having heighten'd the holy Portrait, with his last Agonies of Life, then sent it to be the consecrated Ornament of an Altar? Though we have only the Authority of common Fame, for this Story, yet be it true, or false, the Comparison will still be just. Or let me ask another Question more humanly political.

How came the *Athenians* to lay out an Hundred Thousand Pounds, upon the Decorations of one single Tragedy of *Sophocles*? Not sure, as it was merely a Spectacle for Idleness, or Vacancy of Thought to gape at, but because it was the most rational, most instructive, and delightful Composition, that human Wit had yet arriv'd at; and consequently the most worthy

worthy to be the Entertainment of a wise, and warlike Nation : And it may be still a Question, whether the *Sophocles* inspir'd this Publick Spirit, or this Publick Spirit inspir'd the *Sophocles* ?

But alas ! as the Power of giving, or receiving such Inspirations, from either of these Causes, seems pretty well at an End ; now I have shot my Bolt, I shall descend to talk more like a Man of the Age I live in : For, indeed, what is all this to a common *English* Reader ? Why truly, as *Shakespeare* terms it ——— *Caviare to the Multitude* ! Honest *John Trott* will tell you, that if he were to believe what I have said of the *Athenians*, he is at most but astonish'd at it ; but that if the twentieth Part of the Sum I have mention'd were to be apply'd out of our publick Money, to the setting off the best Tragedy, the nicest Noddle in the Nation could produce, it would probably raise the Passions higher in those that did *Not* like it, than in those that did ; it might as likely meet with an Insurrection, as the Applause of the People, and so, mayhap, be fitter for the Subject of a Tragedy, than for a Publick Fund to support it. ———

Truly, Mr. *Trott*, I cannot but own, that I am very much of your Opinion : I am only concern'd, that the Theatre has not a better Pretence to the Care and further Consideration of those Governments, where it is tolerated ; but as what I have said will not probably do it any great Harm, I hope I have not put you out of Patience, by throwing a few good Wishes after an old Acquaintance.

To conclude this Digression, If, for the Support of the Stage, what is generally shewn there, must be lower'd to the Taste of common Spectators ; or if it is inconsistent with Liberty, to mend that vulgar Taste, by making the Multitude less merry there ; or by abolishing every low and senseless Jollity, in which the Understanding can have no Share ; whenever, I say, such is the State of the Stage, it will be as often liable, to unanswerable Censure, and manifest Disgraces. Yet there was a Time, not yet out of many People's Memory, when it subsisted upon its own rational Labours ; when  
even



## 212 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

even Success attended an Attempt to reduce it to Decency; and when Actors themselves were hardy enough to hazard their Interest, in pursuit of so dangerous a Reformation. And this Crisis, I am myself as impatient, as any tir'd Reader can be to arrive at. I shall therefore endeavour to lead him the shortest way to it. But as I am a little jealous of the badness of the Road, I must reserve to myself the Liberty of calling upon any Matter, in my Way, for a little Refreshment to whatever Company may have the Curiosity, or Goodness, to go along with me.

When the sole menaging Patentee at *Drury-Lane*, for several Years could never be persuaded or driven to any Account with the Adventurers; Sir *Thomas Skipwith* (who, if I am rightly inform'd, had an equal Share with him) grew so weary of the Affair, that he actually made a Present of his entire Interest in it, upon the following Occasion.

Sir *Thomas* happen'd, in the Summer preceding the Re-union of the Companies, to make a Visit to an intimate Friend of his, Colonel *Brett*, of *Sandywell*, in *Gloucestershire*; where the Pleasantness of the Place, and the agreeable manner of passing his Time there, had rais'd him to such a Gallantry of Heart, that, in return to the Civilities of his Friend the Colonel, he made him an Offer of his whole Right in the Patent; but not to over rate the Value of his Present, told him he himself had made nothing of it, these ten Years; But the Colonel (he said) being a greater Favourite of the People in Power, and (as he believ'd) among the Actors too, than himself was, might think of some Scheme, to turn it to Advantage, and in that Light, if he lik'd it, it was at his Service. After a great deal of Raillery on both Sides of what Sir *Thomas* had not made of it, and the particular Advantages the Colonel was likely to make of it; they came to a laughing Resolution, That an instrument should be drawn the next Morning, of an absolute Conveyance of the Premises. A Gentleman of the Law, well known to them both, happening to be a Guest there, at the same time,

time, the next Day produc'd the Deed, according to his Instructions, in the Presence of whom, and of others, itw as sign'd, seal'd, and deliver'd, to the Purposes therein contain'd.

This Transaction may be another Instance (as I have elsewhere observ'd) at how low a Value, the Interest, in a Theatrical License were then held: tho' it was visible, from the Success of *Saviney* in that very Year, that with tolerable Menagement, they could, at no time, have fail'd of being a profitable Purchase.

The next Thing to be consider'd was, what the Colonel should do with his new Theatrical Commission, which, in another's Possession, had been of so little Importance. Here it may be necessary to premise, that this Gentleman was the first of any Consideration, since my coming to the Stage, with whom I had contracted a Personal Intimacy; which might be the Reason, why, in this Debate, my Opinion had some weight with him: Of this Intimacy too, I am the more tempted to talk, from the natural Pleasure of calling back, in Age, the Pursuits, and happy Ardours of Youth long past, which, like the Ideas of a delightful Spring, in a Winters Ruminati<sup>o</sup>n, are sometimes equal to the former Enjoyment of them. I shall therefore, rather chuse, in this Place to gratify myself, than my Reader, by setting the fairest Side of this Gentleman in view, and by indulging a little conscious Vanity, in shewing how early in Life, I fell into the Possession of so agreeable a Companion: Whatever Failings he might have to others, he had none to me; nor was he, where he had them, without his valuable Qualities to ballance or soften them. Let, then, what was not, to be commended in him, rest with his Ashes, never to be rak'd into: But the friendly Favours I receiv'd from him, while living, give me still a Pleasure, in paying this only Mite of my Acknowledgment, in my Power, to his Memory. And if my taking this Liberty, may find Pardon from several of his fair Relations, still living, for whom I profess the utmost Respect,

spect, it will give me but little Concern, tho' my critical Readers should think it all Impertinence.

This Gentleman, then, *Henry*, was the eldest Son of *Henry Brett*, Esq; of *Cowley*, in *Gloucestershire*, who coming early to his Estate of about Two Thousand a Year, by the usual Negligences of young Heirs, had, before this, his eldest Son came of Age, sunk it to about half that Value, and that not wholly free from Incumbrances. Mr. *Brett*, whom I am speaking of, had his Education, and I might say ended it, at the University of *Oxford*; for tho' he was settled some time after at the *Temple*, he so little followed the Law there, that his Neglect of it, made the Law (like some of his fair and frail Admirers) very often follow *him*. As he had an uncommon Share of Social Wit, and a handsom Person, with a sanguine Bloom in his Complexion, no wonder they persuaded him, that he might have a better Chance of Fortune, by throwing such Accomplishments, into the gayer World, than by shutting them up in a Study. The first View, that fires the Head of a young Gentleman of this modish Ambition, just broke loose from Business, is to cut a Figure (as they call it) in a Side-box, at the Play, from whence their next Step is to the *Green Room* behind the Scenes, sometimes their *Non ultra*. Hither, at last then, in this hopeful Quest of his Fortune, came this Gentleman-Errant, not doubting but the fickle Dame, while he was thus qualify'd to receive her, might be tempted to fall into his Lap. And though, possibly, the Charms of our Theatrical Nymphs might have their Share, in drawing him thither; yet in my Observation, the most visible Cause of his first coming, was a more sincere Passion he had conceiv'd for a fair full-bottom'd Perriwig, which I then wore in my first Play of the *Fool in Fashion*, in the Year 1695. For it is to be noted, that the *Beaux* of those Days, were of a quite different Cast, from the modern Stamp, and had more of the Stateliness of the Peacock in their Mien, than (which now seems to be their highest Emulation) the pert Air of a Lapwing. Now whatever Contempt  
Philoso-

Philosophers may have, for a fine Perriwig; my Friend, who was not to despise the World, but to live in it, knew very well, that so material an Article of Dress, upon the Head of a Man of Sense, if it became him, could never fail of drawing to him a more partial Regard, and Benevolence, than could possibly be hop'd for, in an ill-made one. This perhaps may soften the grave Censure, which so youthful a Purchase might otherwise have laid upon him: In a word, he made his Attack upon this Perriwig, as your young Fellows generally do upon a Lady of Pleasure; first, by a few familiar Praises of her Person, and then, a civil Enquiry into the Price of it. But upon his observing me a little surpriz'd at the Levity of his Question, about a Fop's Perriwig, he began to railly himself, with so much Wit and Humour, upon the Folly of his Fondness for it, that he struck me with an equal Desire of granting any thing, in my Power, to oblige so facetious a Customer. This singular Beginning of our Conversation, and the mutual Laughs that ensued upon it, ended in an Agreement, to finish our Bargain that Night, over a Bottle.

If it were possible, the Relation of the happy Indiscretions which pass'd between us that Night, could give the tenth Part of the Pleasure, I then receiv'd from them, I could still repeat them with Delight: But as it may be doubtful, whether the Patience of a Reader may be quite so strong, as the Vanity of an Author, I shall cut it short, by only saying, That single Bottle was the Sire of many a jolly Dozen, that for some Years following, like orderly Children, whenever they were call'd for, came into the same Company. Nor indeed, did I think from that time, whenever he was to be had, any Evening could be agreeably enjoy'd without him. But the long continuance of our Intimacy, perhaps, may be thus accounted for.

He who can taste Wit in another, may, in some sort, be said to have it himself: Now, as I always had, and (I bleis myself for the Folly) still have a quick  
Relish

Relish of whatever did, or can give me Delight: This Gentleman could not but see the youthful Joy, I was generally rais'd to, whenever I had the Happiness of a *Tête à tête* with him; and it may be a moot Point, whether Wit is not as often inspir'd, by a proper Attention, as by the brightest Reply, to it. Therefore as he had Wit enough for any two People, and I had Attention enough for any four, there could not well be wanting a sociable Delight on either side. And tho' it may be true, that a Man of a handsome Person is apt to draw a partial Ear to every thing he says; yet this Gentleman seldom said any thing, that might not have made a Man of the plainest Person agreeable. Such a continual Desire to please, it may be imagin'd, could not but, sometimes lead him into a little venial Flattery, rather than not succeed in it. And I, perhaps, might be one of those Flies, that was caught in this Honey. As I was, then, a young successful Author, and an Actor, in some unexpected Favour, whether deservedly or not, imports not; yet such Appearances, at least were plausible Pretences enough, for an amicable Adulation to enlarge upon; and the Sallies of it a less Vanity, than mine might not have been able to resist. Whatever this Weakness on my side might be, I was not alone in it; for I have heard a Gentleman of Condition say, who knew the World as well as most Men that live in it, that let his Discretion be ever so much upon its guard, he never fell into Mr. *Brett's* Company without being loth to leave it, or carrying away a better Opinion of himself from it. If his Conversation had this Effect among the Men; what must we suppose to have been the Consequence, when he gave it a yet softer turn among the fair Sex? Here now, a *French* Novellist would tell you fifty pretty Lies of him; but as I chuse to be tender of Secrets of that sort, I shall only borrow the good Breeding of that Language, and tell you, in a Word, that I knew several Instances of his being an *Homme à bonne Fortune*. But though his frequent Successes might generally keep him, from the usual Disquiets of a Lover, he knew this was a Life



too liquorish to last; and therefore had Reflexion enough, to be govern'd by the Advice of his Friends, to turn these his Advantages of Nature to a better Use.

Among the many Men of Condition, with whom his Conversation had recommended him, to an Intimacy; Sir *Thomas Skipwith* had taken a particular Inclination to him; and as he had the Advancement of his Fortune, at Heart, introduc'd him, where there was a Lady, who had enough in her Power, to disencumber him of the World, and make him every way, easy, for Life.

While he was in pursuit of this Affair, which no time was to be lost (for the Lady was to be in Town but for three Weeks) I one Day found him idling behind the Scenes, before the Play was begun. Upon sight of him, I took the usual Freedom he allow'd me, to rate him roundly, for the Madness of not improving every Moment, in his Power, in what was of such Consequence to him. Why are you not (said I) where you know you only should be? If your Design should once get Wind, in the Town, the Ill-will of your Enemies, or the Sincerity of the Lady's Friends, may soon blow up your Hopes, which, in your Circumstances of Life, cannot be long supported, by the bare Appearance of a Gentleman.—— But it is impossible to proceed, without some Apology, for the very familiar Circumstance, that is to follow.—— Yet, as it might not be so trivial in its Effect, as I fear it may be in the Narration, and is a Mark of that Intimacy, which is necessary should be known, had been between us, I will honestly make bold with my Scruples, and let the plain Truth of my Story take its Chance for Contempt, or Approbation.

After twenty Excuses, to clear himself of the Neglect, I had so warmly charg'd him with, he concluded them, with telling me, he had been out all the Morning, upon Business, and that his Linnen was too much soil'd, to be seen in Company. Oh, ho! said I, is that all? Come along with me, we will  
U soon,

soon get over that dainty Difficulty: Upon which I haul'd him, by the Sleeve into my Shifting-Room, he either staring, laughing, or hanging back all the Way. There, when I had lock'd him in, I began to strip off my upper Cloaths, and bade him do the same; still he either did not, or would not, seem to understand me, and continuing his Laugh, cry'd, What! is the Puppy mad? No, no, only positive, said I; for look you, in short, the Play is ready to begin, and the Parts that you, and I, are to act to Day, are not of equal Consequence; mine of young *Reveller* (in *Greenwich-Park*) is but a Rake; but whatever you may be, you are not to appear so; therefore take my Shirt, and give me yours; for depend upon't stay here you shall not, and so go about your Business. To conclude, we fairly chang'd Linnen, nor could his Mother's have wrap'd him up more fortunately; for in about ten Days he marry'd the Lady. In a Year or two after his Marriage, he was chosen a Member of that Parliament, which was sitting, when King *William* dy'd. And, upon the raising of some new Regiments, was made Lieutenant-Colonel, to that of Sir *Charles* *Hotham*. But as his Ambition extended not beyond the Bounds of a Park Wall, and a pleasant Retreat in the Corner of it, which with too much Expence he had just finish'd, he, within another Year, had leave to resign his Company to a younger Brother.

This was the Figure, in Life, he made, when Sir *Thomas Skipwith* thought him the most proper Person, to oblige (if it could be an Obligation) with the Present of his Interest in the Patent. And from these Anecdotes of my Intimacy with him, it may be less a Surprize, when he came to Town invested with this new Theatrical Power, that I should be the first Person, to whom he took any Notice of it. And notwithstanding he knew I was then engag'd, in another Interest at the *Hay-Market*, he desired we might consider together, of the best Use he could make of it, assuring me at the same time, he should think it of none to himself, unless it could in some Shape be turn'd to my Advantage. This friendly Declaration, though

though it might be generous in him to make, was not needful, to incline me, in whatever might be honestly in my Power, whether by Interest or Negotiation, to serve him. My first Advice therefore, was, That he should produce his Deed to the other Menaging Patentee of *Drury-Lane*, and demand immediate Entrance to a joint Possession of all Effects, and Powers, to which that Deed had given him an equal Title. After which, if he meet with no Opposition, to this Demand (as upon sight of it he did not) that he should be watchful against any Contradiction, from his Collegue, in whatever he might propose, in carrying on the Affair, but to let him see, that he was determin'd in all his Measures. Yet to heighten that Resolution, with an Ease and Temper in his manner, as if he took it for granted, there could be no Opposition made, to whatever he had a Mind to. For that this Method, added to his natural Talent of Persuading, would imperceptibly lead his Collegue, into a Reliance on his superior Understanding. That however little he car'd for Business, he should give himself the Air at least, of Enquiry into what *had* been done, that what he intended to do, might be thought more considerable, and be the readier comply'd with : For if he once suffer'd his Collegue to seem wiser than himself, there would be no end of his perplexing him with absurd, and dilatory Measures ; direct, and plain Dealing being a Quality his natural Diffidence would never suffer him to be Master of ; of which, his not complying with his Verbal Agreement with *Saviney*, when the *Hay-Market House* was taken for both their Uses, was an Evidence. And though some People thought it Depth, and Policy in him, to keep Things often in Confusion, it was ever my Opinion they over-rated his Skill, and that, in reality his Parts were too weak, for his Post, in which he had always acted, to the best of his Knowledge. That his late Collegue, *Sir Thomas Skipwith*, had trusted too much to his Capacity, for this sort of Business ; and was treated by him accordingly, without ever receiving any Profits

from it, for several Years : Insomuch that when he found his Interest in such desperate Hands, he thought the best thing he could do with it was, (as he saw) to give it away. Therefore if he (Mr. Brett could once fix himself, as I had advis'd, upon a different Foot with this, hitherto untractable Menager, the Business would soon run through whatever Channel he might have a Mind to lead it. And though I allow'd the greatest Difficulty he would meet with, would be in getting his Consent to a Union of the two Companies, which was the only Scheme that could raise the Patent to its former Value, and which I knew, this close Menager, would secretly lay possible Rubs in the Way to ; yet it was visible, there was a Way of reducing him to Compliance : For though, it was true his Caution would never part with a Straw, by way of Concession, yet to a high Hand he would give up any thing, provided he was suffer'd to keep his Title to it : If his Hat were taken from his Head, in the Street, he would make no farther Resistance, than to say, *I am not willing to part with it.* Much less would he have the Resolution openly to oppose any just Measures, when he should find one, who with an equal Right, to his, and with a known Interest to bring them about, was resolv'd to go through with them.

Now though I knew my Friend was as thoroughly acquainted with this Patentee's Temper, as my self, yet I thought it not amiss to quicken and support his Resolution, by confirming to him, the little Trouble he would meet with, in pursuit of the Union I had advis'd him to ; for it must be known, that on our Side, Trouble was a sort of Physick we did not much care to take : But as the Fatigue of this Affair was likely to be lower'd by a good deal of Entertainment, and Humour, which would naturally engage him, in his dealing with so exotick a Partner ; I knew that this softening the Business, into a Diversion, would lessen every Difficulty, that lay in our way to it.

However copiously I may have indulg'd my self in  
this

this Commemoration of a Gentleman, with whom I had pass'd so many of my younger Days, with Pleasure, yet the Reader may by this Insight into his Character, and by that of the other Patentee, be better able to judge of the secret Springs, that gave Motion to, or obstructed so considerable an Event, as that of the Re-union of the two Companies of Actors in 1708. In Histories of more weight, for want of such Particulars, we are often deceiv'd in the true Causes of Facts, that most concern us, to be let into; which sometimes makes us ascribe to Policy, or false Appearances of Wisdom, what perhaps, in Reality, was the mere Effect of Chance or Humour.

Immediately after Mr. Brett was admitted as a joint Patentee, he made use of the Intimacy he had with the Vice-Chamberlain to assist his Scheme of this intended Union, in which he so far prevail'd, that it was soon after left to the particular Care of the same Vice-Chamberlain, to give him all the Aid, and Power necessary to the bringing what he desired, to Perfection. The Scheme was, to have but one Theatre for Plays, and another for Operas, under separate Interests. And this the generality of Spectators, as well as the most approv'd Actors, had been sometime calling for, as the only Expedient to recover the Credit of the Stage, and the valuable Interests of its Menagers.

As the Condition of the Comedians at this time is taken Notice of in my *Dedication of the Wife's Resentment*, to the Marquis (now Duke) of Kent, and then Lord-Chamberlain, which was publish'd above thirty Years ago, when I had no thought of ever troubling the World with this Theatrical History, I see no Reason why it may not pass, as a Voucher of the Facts I am now speaking of; I shall therefore give them, in the very Light I then saw them. After some Acknowledgment for his Lordship's Protection of our (*Hay-Market*) Theatre, it is further said—

“ The Stage has, for many Years, 'till of late,  
“ groan'd under the greatest Discouragements, which  
“ have been very much, if not wholly owing to the  
“ Mismanagement of those, that have awkwardly go-



222 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

“vern’d it. Great Sums have been ventur’d upon  
 “empty Projects, and Hopes of immoderate Gains;  
 “and when those Hopes have fail’d, the Loss has  
 “been tyrannically deducted out of the Actors Sala-  
 “ry. And if your Lordship had not redeem’d them  
 “———*This is meant of our being suffer’d to come*  
 “over to Swiney——they were very near being  
 “wholly laid aside, or at least the Use of their La-  
 “bour was to be swallow’d up, in the pretended  
 “Merit of Singing and Dancing.”

What follows, relates to the Difficulties in dealing  
 with the then Impracticable Menager, *viz.*

“———And though your Lordship’s Tenderness  
 “of oppressing, is so very just, that you have rather  
 “sald to convince a Man of your good Intentions  
 “to him, than to do him even a Service against his  
 “Will; yet since your Lordship has so happily begun  
 “the Establishment of the separate Diversions, we live  
 “in hope, that the same Justice, and Resolution,  
 “will still persuade you, to go as successfully through  
 “with it. But while any Man is suffer’d to confound the  
 “Industry, and Use of them, by acting publicly  
 “in Opposition to your Lordship’s equal Intentions,  
 “under a false, and intricate Pretence of not being  
 “able to comply with them; the Town is likely to  
 “be more entertain’d with the private Dissentions,  
 “than the publick Performance of either, and the  
 “Actors, in a perpetual Fear, and Necessity of peti-  
 “tioning your Lordship every Season, for new Relief.”

Such was the State of the Stage, immediately pre-  
 ceding the time of Mr. Brett’s being admitted a  
 joint Patentee, who, as he saw, with clearer Eyes,  
 what was its evident Interest, left no proper Measures  
 unattempted, to make this, so long despair’d of, Union  
 practicable. The most apparent Difficulty to be got  
 over, in this Affair, was, what could be done for Swi-  
 ney, in consideration of his being oblig’d to give up  
 those Actors, whom the Power and Choice of the Lord-  
 Chamberlain had the Year before, set him at the Head of,  
 and by whose Management, those Actors had found  
 themselves in a prosperous Condition. But an Ac-  
 cident,

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 223

cident, at this Time, happily contributed, to make that Matter easy. The Inclination of our People of Quality for foreign Operas, had now reach'd the Ears of *Italy*, and the Credit of their Taste had drawn over from thence, without any more particular Invitation, one of their capital Singers, the famous Signior *Cavaliere Nicolini*: From whose Arrival, and the Impatience of the Town to hear him, it was concluded, that Operas being now so compleatly provided, could not fail of Success! and that by making *Saviney* sole Director of them, the Profits must be an ample Compensation for his Resignation of the Actors. This Matter being thus adjust'd by *Saviney's* Acceptance of the Opera only to be perform'd at the *Hay-Market House*; the Actors were all order'd to return to *Drury Lane*, there to remain (under the Patentees) her Majesty's only Company of Comedians.

CHAP.

## C H A P. XII.

*A short View of the Opera, when first divided from the Comedy. Plays recover their Credit. The old Patentee uneasy at their Success, Why. The Occasion of Colonel Brett's throwing up his Share in the Patent. The Consequences of it. Anecdotes of Goodman the Actor. The Rate of favourite Actors, in his Time. The Patentees, by endeavouring to reduce their Price, lose them all a second time. The principal Comedians return to the Hay-Market in Shares with Swinney. They alter that Theatre. The original and present Form of the Theatre in Drury-Lane, compar'd. Operas fall off. The Occasion of it. Farther Observations upon them. The Patentee dispossess'd of Drury-Lane Theatre. Mr. Collier, with a New License, heads the Remains of that Company.*

PLAYS, and Operas, being thus establish'd upon separate Interests, they were now left, to make the best of their way, into Favour, by their different Merit. Although the Opera is not a Plant of our Native Growth, nor what our plainer Appetites are fond of, and is of so delicate a Nature, that without excessive Charge, it cannot live long among us; especially while the nicest *Connoisseurs* in Musick fall into such various Heresies in Taste, every Sect pretending to be the true one: Yet as it is call'd a Theatrical Entertainment, and by its Alliance, or Neutrality, has more or less affected our Domestick Theatre, a short View of its Progress may be allow'd a Place in our History.

After this new Regulation, the first Opera that appear'd, was *Pyrrhus*. Subscriptions, at that time, were not extended, as of late, to the whole Season, but were limited to the first six Days only of a new Opera. The chief Performers, in this, were *Nicolini, Valen-*  
*tini,*

*lini*, and *Mrs. Tasts*; and for the inferior Parts, the best that were then to be found. Whatever Praises may have been given to the most famous Voices, that have been heard since *Nicolini*; upon the whole, I cannot but come into the Opinion, that still prevails among several Persons of Condition, who are able to give a Reason for their liking, that no Singer, since his Time, has so justly, and gracefully acquitted himself, in whatever Character he appear'd as *Nicolini*. At most, the Difference between him, and the greatest Favourite of the Ladies, *Farinelli*, amounted but to this, that he might sometimes more exquisitely surprise us, but *Nicolini* (by pleasing the Eye, as well as the Ear) fill'd us with a more various, and *rational* Delight. Whether in this Excellence, he has since had any Competitor, perhaps, will be better judg'd, by what the Critical Censor of *Great Britain* says of him in his 115th *Tatler*, *viz.*

" *Nicolini* sets off the Character he bears in an  
" Opera, by his Action, as much as he does the  
" Words of, it by his Voice; every Limb and Finger  
" contributes to the Part he acts, insomuch that  
" a deaf Man might go along with him in the Sense  
" of it. There is scarce a beautiful Posture, in an  
" old Statue, which he does not plant himself in, as  
" the different Circumstances of the Story give oc-  
" casion for it— He performs the most ordinary  
" Action, in a manner suitable to the Greatness of  
" his Character, and shews the Prince, even in the  
" giving of a Letter, or dispatching of a Message, &c.

His Voice at his first Time of being among us, (for he made us a second Visit when it was impair'd) had all that strong, clear, Sweetness of Tone, so lately admir'd in *Senesino*. A blind Man could scarce have distinguish'd them; but in Volubility of Throat, the former had much the Superiority. This so excellent Performer's Agreement was Eight Hundred Guineas for the Year, which is but an eight Part more than half the Sum that has since been given to several that could never totally surpass him: The Consequence of which is, that the Losses by Operas, for several  
Seasons,

## 226 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

Seasons, to the End of the Year 1738, have been so great, that those Gentlemen of Quality, who last undertook the Direction of them, found it ridiculous any longer to entertain the Publick, at so extravagant an Expence, while no one particular Person thought himself oblig'd by it.

Mrs. *Tofts*, who took her first Grounds of Musick here in her own Country, before the *Italian* Taste had so highly prevail'd, was then but an Adept in it: Yet, whatever Defect the fashionably skilful might find in her manner, she had, in the general Sense of her Spectators, Charms that few of the most learned Singers ever arrive at. The Beauty of her fine proportion'd Figure, and the exquisitely sweet, silver Tone of her Voice, with that peculiar rapid Swiftiness of her Throat, were Perfections not to be imitated by Art or Labour. *Valentini* I have already mention'd, therefore need only say further of him, that though he was every way inferior to *Nicolini*, yet as he had the Advantage of giving us our first Impression of a good Opera Singer, he had still his Admirers, and was of great Service in being so skilful a Second to his Superior.

Three such excellent Performers, in the same kind of Entertainment at once, *England* till this Time had never seen: Without any farther Comparison, then, with the much dearer bought, who have succeeded them; their Novelty, at least was a Charm that drew vast Audiences of the fine World after them. *Saviney* their sole Director was prosperous, and in one Winter, a Gainer by them of a moderate younger Brother's Fortune. But as Musick, by so profuse a Dispensation of her Beauties, could not always supply our dainty Appetites with equal Variety, nor for ever please us with the same Objects; the Opera, after one luxurious Season, like the fine Wife of a roving Husband, began to lose its Charms, and every Day discovered to our Satiety, Imperfections, which our former Fondness had been blind to: But of this I shall observe more in its Place; in the mean time, let us enquire into the Productions of our native Theatre.



It may easily be conceiv'd, that by this entire Reunion of the two Companies, Plays must generally have been perform'd, to a more than usual Advantage and Exactness: For now every chief Actor, according to his particular Capacity, piqued himself upon rectifying those Errors, which during their divided State, were almost unavoidable. Such a Choice of Actors added a Richness to every good Play, as it was then serv'd up to the publick Entertainment: The common People crowded to them, with a more joyous Expectation, and those of the higher Taste return'd to them, as to old Acquaintances with new Desires, after a long Absence. In a Word, all Parties seem'd better pleas'd, but he, who one might imagine had most Reason to be so, the (lately) sole menaging Patentee. He, indeed saw his Power daily mould'ring from his own Hands, into those of Mr. *Brett*; whose Gentlemanly manner of making every one's Business easy to him, threw their old Master under a Disregard, which he had not been us'd to, nor could with all his happy Change of Affairs, support. Although this grave Theatrical Minister, of whom I have been oblig'd to make such frequent mention, had acquired the Reputation of a most profound Politician, by being often incomprehensible, yet I am not sure, that his Conduct at this Juncture, gave us not an evident Proof that he was like other frail Mortals, more a Slave to his Passions, than his Interest; for no Creature ever seem'd more fond of Power, that so little knew how to use it to his Profit and Reputation; otherwise he could not possibly have been so discontented in his secure and prosperous State of the Theatre, as to resolve, at all Hazards, to destroy it. We shall now see what infallible Measures he took, to bring this laudable Scheme to Perfection.

He plainly saw, that as this disagreeable Prosperity was chiefly owing to the Conduct of Mr. *Brett*, there could be no hope of recovering the Stage to its former Confusion, but by finding some effectual Means to make Mr. *Brett* weary of his Charge: The most probable he could, for the present think of, in this  
Distress,

Distress, who was to call in the Adventurers (whom for many Years, by his Defence in Law, he had kept out) now to take care of their visibly improving Interests. This fair Appearance of Equity, being known to be his own Proposal, he rightly guess'd would incline these Adventurers to form a Majority of Votes on his Side in all Theatrical Questions; and consequently become a Check upon the Power of Mr. Brett, who had so visibly alienated the Hearts of his Theatrical Subjects, and now began to govern without him. When the Adventurers, therefore were re-admitted to their old Government; after having recommended himself to them, by proposing to make some small Dividend of the Profits (though he did not design that Jest should be repeated) he took care that the Creditors of the Patent, who were, then, no inconsiderable Body, should carry off the every Weeks clear Profits, in proportion to their several Dues and Demands. This Conduct, so speciously just, he had Hopes would let Mr. Brett see, that his Share in the Patent was not so valuable an Acquisition as, perhaps, he might think it; and probably might make a Man of his Turn to Pleasure, soon weary of the little Profit, and great Plague it gave him. Now, though these might be all notable Expedients, yet I cannot say they would have wholly contributed to Mr. Brett's quitting his Post, had not a Matter of much stronger Moment, an unexpected Dispute between him, and Sir Thomas Skipwith, prevail'd with him to lay it down: For in the midst of this flourishing State of the Patent, Mr. Brett was surpriz'd with a Subpœna into Chancery, from Sir Thomas Skipwith, who alledg'd, in his Bill, that the Conveyance he had made of his Interest in the Patent to Mr. Brett, was only intended in Trust. (Whatever the Intent might be, the Deed itself, which I then read, made no mention of any Trust whatever.) But whether Mr. Brett, as Sir Thomas farther asserted, had previously, or after the Deed was sign'd, given his Word of Honour, that if he should ever make the Stage turn to any Account or Profit, he

would

would certainly restore it : That indeed, I can say nothing to ; but be the Deed valid, or void, the Facts that apparently follow'd were, that tho' Mr. Brett, in his Answer to this Bill, absolutely deny'd his receiving this Assignment, either in Trust, or upon any limited Condition, of what kind soever ; yet he made no farther Defence in the Cause. But since he found Sir Thomas had thought fit, on any Account to sue for the Restitution of it ; and Mr. Brett being himself conscious, that as the World knew, he had paid no Consideration for it ; his keeping it might be misconstrued, or not favourably spoken of ; or perhaps finding, tho' the Profits were great, they were constantly swallow'd up (as has been observ'd) by the previous Satisfaction of old Debts, he grew so tir'd of the Plague and Trouble, the whole Affair had given him, and was likely still to engage him in, that in a few Weeks after, he withdrew himself from all Concern with the Theatre, and quietly left Sir Thomas to find his better Account in it. And thus stood this undecided Right, till upon the Demise of Sir Thomas, Mr. Brett being allow'd the Charges he had been at, in his Attendance, and Prosecution of the Union, reconvey'd this Share of the Patent to Sir George Skipwith, the Son and Heir of Sir Thomas.

Our Politician, the old Patentee, having thus fortunately got rid of Mr. Brett, who had so rashly brought the Patent once more to be a profitable Tenure, was now again at liberty to chuse rather to lose all, than not to have it all to himself.

I have elsewhere observ'd, that nothing can so effectually secure the Strength, or contribute to the Prosperity of a good Company, as the Directors of it having always, as near as possible, an amicable Understanding, with three or four of their best Actors, whose good, or ill-will, must naturally make a wide Difference, in their profitable, or useless manner of serving them : While the Principal are kept reasonably easy, the lower Class can never be troublesome, without hurting themselves : But when a valuable Actor is hardly treated, the Master must be a very

X

cunning

cunning Man, that finds his Account in it. We shall now see how far Experience will verify this Observation.

The Patentees thinking themselves secure, in being restor'd to their former absolute Power, over this, now, only Company, chose rather to govern it by the Reverse of the Method I have recommended: For tho' the daily Charge of their united Company amounted not, by a good deal, to what either of the two Companies, now in *Drury-Lane*, or *Covent Garden*, singly, arises; they notwithstanding fell into their former Politicks, of thinking every Shilling taken from a hir'd Actor, so much clear Gain to the Proprietor: Many of their People, therefore, were actually, if not injudiciously, reduc'd in their Pay, and others given to understand, the same Fate was design'd them, of which last Number I, myself, was one, which occurs to my Memory, by the Answer I made to one of the Adventurers; who, in Justification of their intended Proceeding, told me, that my Salary, tho' it should be less, than it was, by ten Shillings a Week, would still be more than ever *Goodman* had, who was a better Actor, than I could pretend to be: To which I reply'd, This may be true, but then you know, Sir, it is as true, that *Goodman* was forc'd to go upon the High-way for a Livelihood. As this was a known Fact of *Goodman*, my mentioning it, on that Occasion, I believe, was of Service to me; at least my Salary was not reduc'd after it. To say a Word or two more of *Goodman*, so celebrated an Actor, in his Time, perhaps may set the Conduct of the Patentees in a clearer Light. Tho' *Goodman* had left the Stage, before I came to it, I had some slight Acquaintance with him. About the Time of his being expected to be an Evidence against Sir *John Fenwick*, in the Assassination-Plot, in 1696, I happen'd to meet him at Dinner, at Sir *Thomas Skipwith's*, who as he was an agreeable Companion himself, lik'd *Goodman* for the same Quality. Here it was that *Goodman*, without Disguise, or sparing himself, fell into a laughing

Account

Account of several loose Passages of his younger Life; as his being expell'd the University of Cambridge, for being one of the hot-headed Sparks, who were concern'd in the cutting, and defacing the Duke of Monmouth's Picture, then Chancellor of that Place. But this Disgrace, it seems, had not disqualify'd him for the Stage; which like the Sea-Service, refuses no Man, for his Morals, that is able-body'd: There, as an Actor, he soon grew into a different Reputation; but whatever his Merit might be, the Pay of a hired Hero, in those Days, was so very low, that he was forc'd, it seems, to take the Air (as he call'd it) and borrow what Money the first Man he met with had about him. But this being his first Exploit of that kind, which the Scantiness of his Theatrical Fortune had reduc'd him to, King *James* was prevail'd upon, to pardon him: Which *Goodman* said, was doing him so particular an Honour, that no Man could wonder, if his acknowledgment had carry'd him, a little farther, than ordinary, into the Interest of that Prince: But as he had, lately, been out of Luck, in backing his old Master, he had now no way to get home the Life he was out, upon his account, but by being under the same Obligations to King *William*.

Another Anecdote of him, tho' not quite so dishonourably enterprizing, which I had from his own Mouth, at a different time, will equally shew, to what low Shifts in Life, the poor Provision for good Actors, under the early Government of the Patent, reduc'd them. In the younger Days of their Heroism, Captain *Griffin*, and *Goodman*, were confin'd by their moderate Salaries, to the Oeconomy of lying together, in the same Bed, and having but one whole Shirt between them: One of them being under the Obligation of a Rendezvous, with a fair Lady, insisted upon his wearing it, out of his Turn, which occasion'd so high a Dispute, that the Combat was immediately demanded, and accordingly their Pretensions to it, were decided by a fair Tilt upon the Spot, in the Room, where they lay: But whether *Clytus*, or *Alexander* was oblig'd to see no Company, till a worse could be wash'd for him,

X 2

seems



seems not to be a material Point, in their History, or to my Purpose.

By this Rate of *Goodman*, who, till the Time of his quitting the Stage, never had more, than what is call'd forty Shillings a Week, it may be judg'd, how cheap the Labour of Actors had been formerly; and the Patentees thought it a folly to continue the higher Price, (which their Divisions had since rais'd them to) now there was but one Market for them; but alas! they had forgot their former fatal Mistake of squabbling with their Actors, in 1695; nor did they make any Allowance for the Changes and Operations of Time, or enough consider the Interest the Actors had in the Lord Chamberlain, on whose Protection they might always rely, and whose Decrees had been less restrain'd by precedent, than those of a Lord Chancellor.

In this mistaken View of their Interest, the Patentees, by treating their Actors as Enemies, really made them so: And when once the Masters of a hired Company think not their Actors Hearts as necessary, as their Hands, they cannot be said to have agreed for above half the Work, they are able to do in a Day: Or, if an unexpected Success should, notwithstanding, make the Profits, in any gross Disproportion, greater, than the Wages, the Wages will always have something worse, than a Murmur, at the Head of them, that will not only measure the Merit of the Actor, by the Gain of the Proprietor, but will never naturally be quiet, till every Scheme of getting into Property has been try'd, to make the Servant his own Master: And this, as far as Experience can make me judge, will always be, in either of these Cases, the State of our *English* Theatre. What Truth there may be, in this Observation, we are now coming to a Proof of.

To enumerate all the particular Acts of Power, in which the Patentees daily bore hard, upon this, now only Company of Actors, might be as tedious, as unnecessary: I shall therefore come at once, to their most material Grievance, upon which they grounded their Complaint to the Lord-Chamberlain, who in  
the

the Year following, 1709, took effectual Measures for their Relief.

The Patentees observing that the Benefit Plays, of the Actors, towards the latter end of the Season, brought the most crowded Audiences in the Year; began to think their own Interests too much neglected, by these partial Favours of the Town, to their Actors; and therefore judg'd, it would not be impolitick, in such wholesom annual Profits, to have a Fellow-feeling with them. Accordingly, an *Indulto* was laid of one Third, out of the Profits of every Benefit, for the proper Use, and Behoof of the Patent. But, that a clear Judgment may be form'd of the Equity, or Hardship of this Imposition, it will be necessary to shew from whence and from what Causes, the Actors Claim to Benefits originally proceeded.

During the Reign of King Charles, an Actor's Benefit had never been heard of. The first Indulgence of this Kind, was given to Mrs. Barry (as has been formerly observed) in King James's Time, in consideration of the extraordinary Applause, that had followed her Performance: But there this Favour rested, to her alone, 'till after the Division of the only Company in 1695, at which time the Patentees were soon reduc'd to pay their Actors, half in good Words and half in ready Money. In this precarious Condition, some particular Actors (however binding their Agreements might be) were too poor, or too wise to go to Law with a Lawyer; and therefore rather chose to compound their Arrears, for their being admitted to the Chance of having them made up, by the Profits of a Benefit Play. This Expedient had this Consequence; That the Patentees, tho' their daily Audiences, might, and did sometimes mend, still kept the short Subsistence of their Actors, at a stand, and grew more steady in their Resolution so to keep them, as they found them less apt to mutiny, while their Hopes of being clear'd off, by a Benefit, were depending.

## 234 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

In a Year or two these Benefits grew so advantageous, that they became at last, the chief Article, in every Actor's Agreement.

Now though the Agreements of these united Actors, I am speaking of in 1708, were as yet, only Verbal; yet that made no difference in the honest Obligation, to keep them: But, as Honour at that time happen'd to have but a loose hold of their Consciences, the Patentees rather chose to give it the slip, and went on with their Work without it. No Actor, therefore, could have his Benefit fix'd 'till he had first sign'd a Paper, signifying his voluntary Acceptance of it, upon the above Conditions, any Claims from Custom, to the contrary notwithstanding. Several at first refus'd to sign this Paper; upon which the next in Rank were offer'd on the same Conditions, to come before the Refusers; this smart Expedient got some few of the fearful the Preference to their Seniors; who at last, seeing the time was too short for a present Remedy, and that they must either come into the Boat, or lose their Tide, were forc'd to comply, with what, they, as yet, silently, resented as the severest Injury. In this Situation, therefore, they chose to let the principal Benefits be over, that their Grievances might swell into some bulk, before they made any Application for Redress to the Lord-Chamberlain; who, upon hearing their general Complaint, order'd the Patentees to shew cause, why their Benefits had been diminish'd one Third, contrary to the common Usage? the Patentees pleaded the sign'd Agreement, and the Actors Receipts of the other two Thirds, in full Satisfaction. But these were prov'd to have been exacted from them, by the Methods already mentioned. They notwithstanding insist upon them as lawful. But as Law, and Equity do not always agree, they were look'd upon as unjust, and arbitrary. Whereupon the Patentees were warn'd at their Peril, to refuse the Actors full Satisfaction. But here it was thought necessary, that Judgment should be for some time respite'd, 'till the  
Actors,

Actors, who had leave so to do, could form a Body strong enough to make the Inclination of the Lord-Chamberlain to relieve them, practicable.

Accordingly *Swiney* (who was then sole Director of the Opera only) had permission to enter into a private Treaty, with such of the united Actors in *Drury-Lane*, as might be thought fit to head a Company, under their own Management, and to be Sharers with him in the *Hay-Market*. The Actors chosen for this Charge, were *Wilks*, *Dagget*, *Mrs. Oldfield*, and Myself. But before I proceed, lest it should seem surprizing, that neither *Betterton*, *Mrs. Barry*, *Mrs. Bracegirdle*, or *Booth*, were Parties in this Treaty; it must be observ'd, that *Betterton* was now Seventy-three, and rather chose, with the Infirmities of Age upon him, to rely on such Salary, as might be appointed him, than to involve himself in the Cares, and Hurry, that must unavoidably attend the Regulation of a new Company. As to the two celebrated Actresses I have named, this has been my first proper Occasion of making it known, that they had both quitted the Stage the Year before this Transaction was thought of. And *Booth*, as yet, was scarce out of his Minority as an Actor, or only in the promise of that Reputation, which in about four or five Years after, he happily arriv'd at. However, at this Juncture, he was not so far overlook'd, as not to be offer'd a valuable Addition to his Salary; But this he declin'd, being, while the Patentees were under this Distress, as much, if not more, in favour, with their chief Manager, as a Schematist, than as an Actor: And indeed he appear'd, to my Judgment, more inclin'd to risque his Fortune in *Drury-Lane*, where he should have no Rival in Parts, or Power, than on any Terms to embark in the *Hay-Market*; where he was sure to meet with Opponents in both. However this his Separation from our Interest, when our All was at stake, afterwards kept his Advancement, to a Share with us, in our more successful Days, longer postpon'd than otherwise it probably might have been.

When

When Mrs. *Oldfield* was nominated as a joint Sharer, in our new agreement to be made with *Saviney*; *Dagget*, who had no Objection to her Merit, insisted that our Affairs could never be upon a secure Foundation, if there was more, than one Sex admitted to the Management of them. He therefore hop'd, that if we offer'd Mrs. *Oldfield* a *Carte Blanche*, instead of a Share, she would not think herself slighted. This was instantly agreed to, and Mrs. *Oldfield* receiv'd it rather as a Favour, than a Disobligation. Her Demands therefore were Two Hundred Pounds a Year certain, and a Benefit clear of all Charges; which were readily sign'd to. Her Easiness on this Occasion, some Years after, when our Establishment was in Prosperity, made us, with less Reluctancy advance her Two Hundred Pounds, to Three Hundred Guineas *per Annum*, with her usual Benefit, which upon an Average for several Years at least, doubled that Sum.

When a sufficient number of Actors were engag'd, under our Confederacy with *Saviney*, it was then judged a proper time, for the Lord Chamberlain's Power, to operate, which, by lying above a Month dormant, had so far recover'd the Patentees, from any apprehensions of what might fall upon them, from their late Usurpations on the Benefits of the Actors, that they began to set their Marks, upon those who had distinguish'd themselves, in the application for Redress. Several little Disgraces were put upon them; particularly in the Disposal of parts, in Plays to be reviv'd, and as visible a Partiality was shewn in the Promotion of those in their Interest, though their Endeavours to serve them could be of no extraordinary use. How often does History shew us, in the same State of Courts, the same Politicks have been practis'd? All this while the other Party were passively silent; 'till one Day, the Actor who particularly solicited their Cause, at the Lord Chamberlain's Office, being shewn there the order sign'd, for absolutely silencing the Patentees, and ready to be serv'd, flew back with the News to his Companions, then at a Rehearsal, in which he had been wanted; when being call'd to his



his Part, and something hastily question'd by the Patentee, for his Neglect of Business: This Actor, I say, with an erected Look, and a Theatrical Spirit, at once threw off the Mask, and roundly told him——*Sir, I have now no more Business here, than you have; in half an Hour, you will neither have Actors to command, nor Authority, to employ them.*——The Patentee, who though he could not readily comprehend his mysterious manner of Speaking, had just a Glimpse of Terror enough from the Words, to soften his Reproof into a cold formal Declaration, *'That if he would not do his Work, he should not be paid*— But now, to complete the Catastrophe of these Theatrical Commotions, enters the Messenger, with the Order of Silence in his Hand, whom the same Actor officiously introduc'd, telling the Patentee, that the Gentleman wanted to speak with him, from the Lord-Chamberlain. When the Messenger had delivered the Order, the Actor throwing his head over his Shoulder, towards the Patentee, in the manner of *Shakspeare's Harry the Eighth* to Cardinal *Wolsey*, cry'd --- *Read o'er that! and now--- to Breakfast, with what Appetite you may.* Though these Words might be spoken, in too vindictive, and insulting a manner, to be commended; yet from the Fulness of a Heart injuriously treated, and now believ'd by that instant Occasion, why might they not be pardon'd?

The Authority of the Patent now no longer subsisting, all the confederating Actors immediately walk'd out of the House, to which they never return'd, 'till they became themselves the Tenants, and Masters of it.

Here again, we see an higher Instance of the Authority of a Lord-Chamberlain, than any of those I have elsewhere mentioned: From whence that Power might be deriv'd, as I have already said, I am not Lawyer enough to know; however it is evident that Lawyer obey'd it, though to his Cost; which might incline, one to think, that the Law was not clearly against it: Be that as it may, since the Law has lately made it no longer a Question, let us drop the Enquiry,

## 238 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

Enquiry, and proceed to the Facts, which follow'd this Order, that silenc'd the Patent.

From this last injudicious Disagreement of the Patentees with their principal Actors, and from what they had suffered on the same Occasion, in the Division of their only Company in 1695, might we not imagine there was something of Infatuation, in their Management? For though I allow Actors, in general, when they are too much indulg'd, or govern'd by an unsteady Head, to be as unruly a Multitude as a Power can be plagued with; yet there is a Medium, which, if cautiously observed by a candid use of Power, making them always know, without feeling their Superior, neither suffering their Encroachments, nor invading their Rights, with an immovable Adherence to the accepted Laws, they are to walk by; such a Regulation, I say, has never fail'd in my Observation, to have made them a tractable, and profitable Society. If the Government of a well-establish'd Theatre were to be compar'd to that of a Nation; there is no one Act of Policy, or Misconduct in the one, or the other, in which the Manager might not, in some parallel Case (laugh, if you please) be equally applauded, or condemned with the Statesman. Perhaps this will not be found so wild a Conceit, if you look into the 193d *Tatler*, Vol. 4. where the Affairs of the State, and those of the very Stage, which I am now treating of, are, in a Letter from *Devon* the Prompter, compar'd, and with a great deal of Wit, and Humour, set upon an equal Foot of Policy. The Letter is suppos'd to have been written in the last Change of the Ministry in Queen *Anne's* Time. I will therefore venture, upon the Authority of that Author's Imagination, to carry the Comparison as high, as it can possibly go, and say, That as I remember one of our Princes, in the last Century, to have lost his Crown, by too arbitrary a Use of his Power, though he knew how fatal the same Measures had been to his unhappy Father before him; why should we wonder, that the same

Passions

## *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c. 239*

Passions taking Possession of Men, in lower Life, by an equally Impolitick Usage of their Theatrical Subjects, should have involved the Patentees, in proportionable Calamities.

During the Vacation, which immediately follow'd the Silence of the Patent, both Parties were at Leisure to form their Schemes for the Winter: For the Patentee would still hold out, notwithstanding his being so miserably maim'd, or over match'd: He had no more Regard to Blows, than a blind Cock of the Game; he might be beaten, but would never yield, the Patent was still in his Possession, and the Broad-Seal to it visibly as fresh as ever: Beside, he had yet some Actors in his Service, at a much cheaper Rate than those who had left him, the Salaries of which last now they would not work for him, he was not oblig'd to pay. In this way of thinking, he still kept together such as had not been invited over to the *Hay-Market*, or had been influenc'd by *Booth*, to follow his Fortune in *Drury-Lane*.

By the Patentee's keeping these Remains of his broken Forces together, it is plain that he imagin'd this Order of Silence, like others of the same kind, would be recall'd of Course, after a reasonable time of Obedience had been paid to it: But it seems, he had rely'd too much upon former Precedents; nor had his Politicks yet div'd into the Secret, that the Court Power, with which the Patent had been so long, and often at Variance, had now a mind to take the publick Diversions more absolutely into their own Hands: Not that I have any stronger Reasons for this Conjecture than that the Patent, never after this Order of Silence, got leave to play during the Queen's Reign. But upon the Accession of his late Majesty, Power having then a different Aspect the Patent found no Difficulty in being permitted to exercise its former Authority for acting Plays, &c. which however from this Time of their lying still, in 1709, did not happen 'till 1714, and which the old Patentee never liv'd to see; For he dy'd about six Weeks before the new-bullt Theatre in *Lincoln's-Inn Fields* was open'd, where the first Play acted

was

was the *Recruiting-Officer*, under the Management of his Heirs, and Successors. But of that Theatre, it is not yet Time to give any further Account.

The first Point resolv'd on, by the Comedians now re-establish'd in the *Hay-Market*, was to alter the Auditory Part of their Theatre; the Inconveniencies of which have been fully enlarg'd upon in a former Chapter. What embarrass'd them most in this Design, was their want of Time to do it in a more complete manner, than it now remains in, otherwise they had brought it to the original Model of that in *Drury-Lane*, only in a larger Proportion, as the wider walls of it would require; as there are not many Spectators who may remember what Form the *Drury-Lane* Theatre stood in, about forty Years ago, before the old Patentee, to make it hold more Money, took it in his Head to alter it, it were but Justice to lay the original Figure, which Sir *Christopher Wren* first gave it, and the Alterations of it, now standing in a fair Light; that equal Spectators may see, if they were at their choice, which of the Structures would incline them to a Preference. But in this Appeal, I only speak to such Spectators as allow a good Play, well acted, to be the most valuable Entertainment of the Stage. Whether such Plays (leaving the Skill of the dead, or living Actors equally out of the Question) have been more or less, recommended in their Presentation, by either of these different Forms of that Theatre, is our present matter of Enquiry.

It must be observ'd then, that the Area, or Platform of the old Stage, projected about four Foot forwarder, in a Semi-oval Figure, parallel to the Benches of the Pit; and that the former, lower Doors of Entrance for the Actors, were brought down between the two foremost (and then only) Pilasters; in the Place of which Doors, now the two Stage-Boxes are fixt. That where the Doors of Entrance now are, there formerly stood two additional Side-wings, in Front to a full Set of Scenes, which had then almost a double Effect, in their Loftiness, and Magnificence.

By

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 241

By this original Form, the usual Station of the Actors, in almost every Scene, was advanc'd at least ten Foot nearer to the Audience, than they now can be; because, not only from the Stage's being shorten'd, in front, but likewise from the additional Interposition of those Stage-Boxes, the Actors (in respect to the Spectators, that fill them) are kept so much more backward from the main Audience, than they us'd to be: But when the Actors were in Possession of that forwarder Space, to advance upon, the Voice was then more in the Centre of the House, so that the most distant Ear had scarce the least Doubt, or Difficulty in hearing what fell from the weakest Utterance: All Objects were thus drawn nearer to the Sense; every painted Scene was stronger; every Grand Scene and Dance more extended; every rich, or fine-coloured Habit had a more lively Lustre: Nor was the minutest Motion of a Feature (properly changing with the Passion, or Humour it suited) ever lost, as they frequently must be in the Obscurity of too great a Distance: And how valuable an Advantage the Facility of hearing distinctly, is to every well-acted Scene, every common Spectator is a Judge. A Voice scarce rais'd above the Tone of a Whisper, either in Tenderness, Resignation, innocent Distress, or Jealousy, suppress'd, often have as much concern with the Heart, as the most clamorous Passions; and when on any of these Occasions, such affecting Speeches are plainly heard, or lost, how wide is the Difference, from the great or little Satisfaction received from them? To all this a Master of a Company may say, I now receive Ten Pounds more, than could have been taken formerly, in every full House! Not unlikely. But might not his House be oftner full, if the Auditors were oftner pleas'd? Might not every bad House too, by a Possibility of being made every Day better, add as much to one Side of his Account, as it could take from the other? If what I have said, carries any Truth in it, why might not the original Form of this Theatre be restor'd? But let this Digression avail what it may, the Actors now return'd

Y



turn'd to the *Hay-Market*, as I have observ'd, wanted nothing but length of time to have govern'd their Alteration of that Theatre, by this original Model of *Drury-Lane*, which I have recommended. As their Time therefore was short, they made their best use of it; they did something to it: They contracted its Width, by three Ranges of Boxes on each Side, and brought down its enormous high Cieling, within so proportionable a Compass, that it effectually cured those hollow Undulations of the Voice formerly complain'd of. The Remedy had its Effect; their Audiences exceeded their Expectation. There was now no other Theatre open against them; they had the Town to themselves; they were their own Masters, and the Profits of their Industry came into their own Pockets.

Yet with all this fair Weather, the Season of their uninterrupted Prosperity was not yet arriv'd; for the great Expence, and thinner Audiences of the Opera (of which they then were equally Directors) was a constant Draw-back upon their Gains, yet not so far, but that their Income this Year, was better than in their late Station, at *Drury-Lane*. But by the short Experience we had then had of Operas; by the high Reputation they seem'd to have been arriv'd at, the Year before; by their Power of drawing the whole Body of Nobility, as by Enchantment, to their Solemnities; by that Prodigality of Expence, at which they were so willing to support them; and from the late extraordinary Profits *Savigny* had made of them, what Mountains did we not hope from this Mole-hill? But alas! the fairy Vision was vanish'd, this bridal Beauty was grown familiar to the general Taste, and Satirey began to make Excuses for its want of Appetite: Or what is still stronger, its late Admirers now as much valued their Judgment, in being able to find out the Faults of the Performers, as they had before, in discovering their Excellencies. The Truth is, that this kind of Entertainment being so intirely sensual, it had no Possibility of getting the better of our Reason, but by its Novelty; and that Novelty could never be sup-

supported but by an annual Change of the best Voices, which like the finest Flowers, bloom but for a Season, and when that is over, are only dead Nose-gays. From this Natural Cause, we have seen within these two Years, even *Farinelli* singing to an Audience of five and thirty Pounds; and yet, if common Fame may be credited, the same Voice, so neglected in one Country, has in another had Charms sufficient to make that Crown sit easy, on the Head of a Monarch, which the Jealousy of Politicians (who had their Views, in his keeping it) fear'd without some such extraordinary Amusement, his Satiety of Empire might tempt him, a second time, to resign.

There is too, in the very Species of an *Italian* Singer, such an innate, fantastical Pride, and Caprice, that the Government of them (here at least) is almost impracticable. This Distemper, as we were not sufficiently warn'd, or appriz'd of, threw our musical Affairs into Perplexities, we knew not easily how to get out of. There is scarce a sensible Auditor, in the Kingdom, that has not, since that Time, had Occasion to laugh at the several Instances of it: But what is still more ridiculous, these costly Canary-Birds have sometimes infested the whole Body of our dignified Lovers of Musick, with the same childish Animosities: Ladies have been known to decline their Visits, upon account of their being of a different musical Party. *Cæsar* and *Pompey* made not a warmer Division, in the *Roman* Republick, than those Heroines, their Country Women, the *Faustina* and *Ciceroni* blew up in our Common-wealth, of Academical Musick, by their implacable Pretensions to Superiority! And while this Greatness of Soul is their unalterable Virtue, it will never be practicable to make two capital Singers of the same Sex, do as they should do, in one Opera, at the same Time! no, not tho' *England* were to double the Sums it has already thrown after them: For even in their own Country, where an extraordinary Occasion has called a greater Number of their best, to sing together, the Mischief they have

Y 2

made

made has been proportionable; an Instance of which, if I am rightly inform'd, happen'd at *Parma*, where upon the Celebration of the Marriage of that Duke, a Collection was made of the most eminent Voices, that Expence, or Interest could purchase, to give as complete an Opera, as the whole vocal Power of *Italy* could form. But when it came to the Proof of this musical Project, behold! what woeful Work they made of it! Every Performer would be a *Cæsar*, or nothing; their several Pretensions to Preference were not to be limited within the Laws of Harmony; they would all chuse their own Songs, but not more to let off themselves, than to oppose, or deprive another of an Occasion to shine: Yet any one would sing a bad Song, provided no body else had a good one, till at last, they were thrown together like so many feather'd Warriors, for a Battle-royal, in a Cock-pit, where every one was oblig'd to kill another, to save himself! What Pity it was these froward Misses, and Masters of Musick had not been engag'd to entertain the Court of some King of *Morocco*, that could have known a good Opera, from a bad one! with how much Ease would such a Director have brought them to better Order! But alas! as it has been said of greater Things,

*Sunt et ipsa Roma viribus ruit.*

Hor.

Imperial *Rome* fell, by the too great Strength of its own Citizens! So fell this mighty Opera, ruin'd by the too great Excellency of its Singers! For, upon the whole, it prov'd to be as barbarously bad, as if Malice itself had compos'd it.

Now though something of this kind, equally provoking, has generally embarrass'd the State of Operas, these thirty Years, yet it was the Misfortune of the managing Actors, at the *Hay-Market*, to have felt the first Effects of it: The Honour of the Singer, and the Interest of the Undertaker were so often at Variance, that the latter began to have but a bad Bargain of it. But not to impute more to the Caprice of those Performers, than was really true, there were two different Ac-

cidents,

cidents, that drew Numbers from our Audiences, before the Season was ended ; which were another Company permitted to act in *Drury Lane*, and the long Trial of Doctor *Sachewerel*, in *Westminster-Hall* : By the way it must be observ'd, that this Company was not under the Direction of the Patent (which continued still silenc'd) but was set up by a third Interest, with a License from Court. The Person to whom this new License was granted, was *William Collier, Esq* ; a Lawyer of an enterprizing Head, and a jovial Heart ; what sort of Favour he was in, with the People, then, in Power, may be judg'd, from his being often admitted to partake with them those detach'd Hours of Life, when Business was to give way to Pleasure : But this was not all his Merit, he was, at the same time, a Member of Parliament for *Truro* in *Cornwall*, and we cannot suppose a Person so qualified could be refus'd such a Trifle, as a License to head a broken Company of Actors. This sagacious Lawyer, then, who had a Lawyer to deal with, observing that his Antagonist kept Possession of a Theatre, without making use of it, and for which he was not oblig'd to pay Rent, unless he actually *did* use it, wisely conceiv'd it might be the Interest of the Joint Landlords, since their Tenement was in so precarious a Condition to grant a Lease to one who had an undisputed Authority, to be liable, by acting Plays in it, to pay the Rent of it ; especially when he tempted them with an Offer of raising it from three, to four Pounds *per Diem*. His Project succeeded, the Lease was sign'd ; but the Means of getting into Possession were to be left to his own Cost, and Discretion. This took him up but little Time, he immediately laid Siege to it, with a sufficient Number of Forces, whether lawless or lawful, I forget, but they were such as oblig'd the old Governor to give it up ; who, notwithstanding had got Intelligence of his Approaches, and Design, time enough to carry off every thing that was worth moving, except a great Number of old Scenes, and new Actors, that could not easily follow him.

246 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

A ludicrous Account of this Transaction, under fictitious Names, may be found in the 99th *Tatler*, Vol. 2. which this Explanation may now render more intelligible, to the Readers of that agreeable Author.

This other new License being now in Possession of the *Drury-Lane* Theatre; those Actors, whom the Patentee, ever since the Order of Silence, had retain'd in a State of Inaction, all to a Man came over to the Service of *Collier*. Of these, *Booth* was then the chief. The Merit of the rest had as yet made no considerable Appearance, and as the Patentee had not left a Rag of their cloathing behind him, they were but poorly equip'd for a publick Review; consequently at their first Opening, they were very little able to annoy us. But during the Trial of *Sacheverel*, our Audiences were extremely weaken'd, by the better Rank of People's daily attending it: While, at the same time, the lower Sort, who were not equally admitted to that grand Spectacle, as eagerly crowded into *Drury-Lane*, to a new Comedy, called *The fair Quaker of Deal*. This Play, having some low Strokes of natural Humour in it, was rightly calculated, for the Capacity of the Actors, who play'd it, and, to the Taste of the Multitude, who were now more dispos'd, and at leisure to see it: But the most happy Incident in its Fortune was the Charm of the fair Quaker, which was acted by Miss *Santlow*, (afterwards Mrs. *Booth*) whose Person was then in the full Bloom of what Beauty she might pretend to: Before this, she had only been admired as the most excellent Dancer; which, perhaps, might not a little contribute to the favourable Reception, she now met with as an Actress, in this Character, which so happily suited her Figure, and Capacity: The gentle Softness of her Voice, the compos'd Innocence of her Aspect, the Modesty of her Dress, the reserv'd Decency of her Gesture, and the Simplicity of the Sentiments, that naturally fell from her, made her seem the amiable Maid she represented: In a Word, not the enthusiastick Maid of *Orleans*, was more serviceable of old, to the *French* Army, when the *English*



*gliff* had distress'd them, than this fair Quaker was, at the Head of that dramattick Attempt, upon which the Support of their weak Society depended.

But when the Trial, I have mention'd, and the Run of this Play was over, the Tide of the Town beginning to turn again in our Favour, *Collier* was reduc'd to give his Theatrical Affairs a different Scheme; which advanc'd the Stage another Step towards that Settlement, which, in my Time, was of the longest Duration.

### C H A P. XIII.

*The Patentee, having now no Actors, rebuilds the new Theatre in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields. A Guess at his Reasons for it. More Changes, in the State of the Stage. The Beginning of its better Days under the Triumvirate of Actors. A Sketch of their governing Characters.*

**A**s coarse Mothers may have comely Children; so Anarchy has been the Parent of many a good Government; and by a Parity of possible Consequences we shall find, that from the frequent Convulsions of the Stage, arose, at last, its longest Settlement, and Prosperity; which many of my Readers (or if I should happen to have but few of them, many of my Spectators, at least) who, I hope, have not yet liv'd half their Time, will be able to remember.

Though the Patent had been often under Distresses, it had never felt any Blow, equal to this unrevoked Order of Silence; which it is not easy to conceive could have fallen upon any other Person's Conduct, than that of the old Patentee: For if he was conscious, of his being under the Subjection of that Power, which had silenc'd him, why would he incur the

the Danger of a Suspension, by his so obstinate, and impolitick Treatment of his Actors? If he thought such Power over him illegal, how came he to obey it now, more than before, when he slighted a former Order, that injoin'd him to give his Actors their Benefits on their usual Conditions? But to do him Justice, the same Obstinacy, that involv'd him in these Difficulties, at last, preserv'd to his Heirs the Property of the Patent, in its full Force and Value; yet to suppose that he foresaw a milder use of Power, in some future Prince's Reign, might be more favourable to him, is begging at best but a cold Question. But whether he knew that this broken Condition of the Patent, would not make his troublesome Friends, the Adventurers fly from it as from a falling House, seems not so difficult a Question. However, let the Reader form his own Judgment of them, from the Facts, that follow'd: It must therefore be observ'd, that the Adventurers seldom came near the House, but when there was some visible Appearance of a Dividend: But I could never hear, that upon an ill Run of Audience, they had ever returned, or brought in a single Shilling, to make good the Deficiencies of their daily Receipts. Therefore, as the Patentee, in Possession, had alone, for several Years, supported, and stood against this Uncertainty of Fortune, it may be imagin'd, that his Accounts were under so voluminous a Perplexity, that few of those Adventurers would have Leisure or Capacity enough to unravel them: And as they had formerly thrown away their Time, and Money at Law, in a fruitless Enquiry into them, they now seem'd to have intirely given up their Right and Interest: And, according to my best Information, notwithstanding the subsequent Gains of the Patent have been sometimes extraordinary, the farther Demands, or Claims of Right of the Adventurers have lain dormant, above these five and twenty Years.

Having shewn by what means *Collier* had dispossest'd this Patentee, not only of the *Drury-Lane* House, but like-

likewise of those few Actors, which he had kept, for some time unemploy'd in it; we are now led to consider another Project of the same Patentee, which, if we are to judge of by the Event, has shewn him more a Wise, than a Weak Man; which I confess, at the time he put it in Execution, seem'd not so clear a point: For notwithstanding he now saw the Authority, and power of his Patent was superseded, or was at best but precarious, and that he had not one Actor left, in his Service; yet under all these Dilemmas, and Distresses, he resolv'd upon rebuilding the New Theatre in *Lincoln's-Inn-Fields*, of which he had taken a Lease, at a low Rent, ever since *Betterton's* Company had first left it. This Conduct seem'd too deep for my Comprehension! What are we to think of his taking this Lease, in the height of his Prosperity, when he could have no Occasion for it? Was he a Prophet? Could he then foresee, he should, one time or other, be turn'd out of *Drury-Lane*? Or did his mere Appetite of Architecture urge him to build a House, while he could not be sure, he should ever have leave to make use of it? But of all this, we may think as we please; whatever was his Motive, he, at his own Expence, in this Interval of his having nothing else to do, rebuilt that Theatre from the Ground, as it is now standing. As for the Order of Silence, he seem'd little concern'd at it, while it gave him so much uninterrupted Leisure to supervise a Work, which he naturally took Delight in.

After this Defeat of the Patentee, the Theatrical Forces of *Collier* in *Drury-Lane*, notwithstanding their having drawn the Multitude after them, for about three Weeks, during the Trial of *Sacheverel*, had made but an indifferent Campaign, at the end of the Season. *Collier*, at least, found so little Account in it, that it oblig'd him to push his Court Interest (which, wherever the Stage was concern'd, was not inconsiderable) to support him in another Scheme; which was, that in consideration of his giving up the *Drury-Lane*, Cloaths, Scenes, and Actors, to *Saviney*, and his joint Sharers, in the *Hay-Market*, he (*Collier*) might be put

put into an equal possession of the *Hay-Market*, Theatre, with all the Singers, &c. and be made sole Director of the Opera. Accordingly, by permission of the Lord-Chamberlain, a Treaty was enter'd into, and in a few Days ratified by all Parties, conformable to the said Preliminaries. This was that happy Crisis of Theatrical Liberty, which the labouring Comedians had long sigh'd for; and which, for above twenty Years following, was so memorably fortunate to them.

However, there were two hard Articles, in this Treaty, which though it might be Policy in the Actors, to comply with, yet the imposition of them seem'd little less despotick, than a Tax upon the Poor, when a Government did not want it.

The first of these Articles was, That whereas the sole License for acting Plays, was presum'd to be a more profitable Authority, than that for acting Operas only; that therefore Two Hundred Pounds a year should be paid to *Collier*, while Master of the Opera, by the Comedians; to whom a Verbal Assurance was given by the *Plenipo's* on the Court-side, that while such Payment subsisted, no other Company should be permitted to act Plays against them, within the Liberties, &c. The other Article was, That on every *Wednesday*, whereon an Opera could be perform'd, the Plays should, *toties quoties*, be silent at *Drury-Lane*, to give the Opera a fairer Chance, for a full House.

This last Article, however partial, in the Intention, was in its Effect, of great advantage to the sharing Actors: For in all publick Entertainments, a Day's abstinence naturally increases the Appetite to them: Our every *Thursday's* Audience, therefore, was visibly the better, by thus making the Day before it a Fast. But as this was not a Favour design'd us, this prohibition of a Day, methinks, deserves a little farther Notice; because it evidently took a sixth part of their Income, from all the hired Actors, who were only paid, in proportion to the Number of acting Days. This extraordinary Regard to Operas, was in effect making the Day-labouring Actors the principal Subscribers to them,

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 251

them, and the shutting out People from the Play every *Wednesday*, many murmured at, as an Abridgment of their usual Liberty. And tho' I was one of those who profited by that Order, it ought not to bribe me, into a Concealment of what was then said and thought of it. I remember a Nobleman of the first Rank, then in a high Post, and not out of Court-Favour, said openly behind the Scenes——— *It was shameful to take part of the Actors Bread from them to support the silly Diversion of People of Quality.* But alas! what was all this Grievance, when weighed against the Qualifications of so grave, and stanch a Senator, as *Collier*? Such visible Merit, it seems, was to be made easy, tho' at the Expence of the——— I had almost said, *Honour* of the Court, whose gracious Intention for the Theatrical Common-wealth, might have shone with thrice the Lustre, if such a paltry Price had not been paid for it. But as the Government of the Stage, is but that of the World in Miniature, we ought not to have wondered, that *Collier* had Interest enough to quarter the Weakness of the Opera upon the Strength of the Comedy. General good Intentions are not always practicable to a Perfection. The most necessary Law can hardly pass, but a Tenderness to some private Interest, shall often hang such Exceptions upon particular Clauses, 'till at last it comes out lame, and lifeless, with the Loss of half its Force, Purpose, and Dignity. As for Instance; how many fruitless Motions have been made in Parliaments, to moderate the enormous Exactions, in the Practice of the Law? And what sort of Justice must that be call'd, which, when a Man has not a mind to pay you a Debt of Ten Pounds, it shall cost you Fifty, before you can get it? How long too, has the Publick being labouring for a Bridge at *Westminster*? But the Wonder, that it was not built an hundred Years ago, ceases, when we are told, that the Fear of making one End of *London*, as rich, as the other, has been, so long, an Obstruction to it: And though it might seem a still greater Wonder, when a new Law for building one had at last  
got



got over that apprehension, that it should meet with any farther Delay; yet Experience has shewn us, that the Structure of this useful Ornament to our Metropolis has been so clog'd by private Jobs, that were to be pick'd out of the Undertaking, and the progress of the Work so disconcerted by a tedious Contention of private Interests, and Endeavourss to impose upon the Publick abominable Bargains, that a whole Year was lost, before a single Stone could be laid to its Foundation, But Posterity will owe its praises, to the Zeal, and Resolution of a truly Noble Commissioner, whose distinguish'd Impatience has broke thro' those narrow Artifices, those false and frivolous Objections, that delay'd it, and has already began to raise, above the Tide, that future Monument of his publick Spirit.

How far all this may be allow'd applicable to the State of the Stage, is not of so great Importance, nor so much my Concern, as that what is observ'd upon it should always remain a memorable Truth, to the Honour of that Nobleman. But now I go on: *Collier* being thus possess'd of his Musical Government, thought his best way would be to farm it out to a Gentleman, *Aaron Hill*, Esq; (who, he had reason to suppose, knew something more of Theatrical Matters, than himself) at a Rent, if I mistake not, of Six Hundred Pounds *per Annum*: But before the Season was ended (upon what occasion, if I could remember, it might not be material to say) took it into his Hands again: But all his Skill, and Interest, could not raise the Direction of the Opera, to so good a Post, as he thought due to a Person of his Consideration: He therefore, the Year following, enter'd upon another high-handed Scheme, which, 'till the Demise of the Queen, turn'd to his better Account.

After the Comedians were in possession of *Drury-Lane*, from whence, during my time upon the Stage, they never departed; their Swarm of Audiences exceeded all that had been seen, in thirty Years before; which, however, I do not impute so much to the Excellence of their Acting, as to their indefatigable Industry,

dusttry, and good Management ; for as I have often said, I never thought, in the general, that we stood in any Place of Comparifon with the eminent Actors before us ; perhaps too, by there being now an End of the frequent Divifions, and Disorders, that had from time to time broke in upon, and frustrated their Labours, not a little might be contributed to their Successes.

*Collier*, then, like a true liquorish Courtier, observing the Prosperity of a Theatre, which he, the Year before had parted with for a worse, began to meditate an Exchange of Theatrical Posts with *Swiney*, who had visibly very fair Pretensions to that he was in, by his being first chosen, by the Court, to regulate, and rescue the Stage from the Disorders it had suffer'd, under its former Managers : Yet *Collier* knew that sort of Merit could stand in no Competition, with his being a Member of Parliament : He therefore had Recourse to his Court-Interest (where meer Will, and Pleasure, at that time, was the only Law, that dispos'd of all Theatrical Rights) to oblige *Swiney* to let him be off, from his bad Bargain, for a better. To this, it may be imagin'd *Swiney* demurr'd, and as he had Reason, strongly remonstrated against it : But as *Collier* has list'd his Conscience under the Command of Interest, he kept it to strict Duty, and was immovable ; insomuch that Sir *John Vanburgh*, who was a Friend to *Swiney*, and who by his Intimacy with the People in Power, better knew the Motive of their Actions, advis'd *Swiney* rather to accept of the Change, than by a Non-compliance to hazard his being excluded from any Post, or Concern in either of the Theatres : To conclude, it was not long before *Collier* had procured a new License for acting Plays, &c. for himself, *Wilks*, *Dogget*, and *Cibber*, exclusive of *Swiney*, who by this new Regulation was reduc'd to his *Hobson's Choice* of the Opera.

*Swiney* being thus transferr'd to the Opera, in the sinking condition *Collier* had left it, found the Receipts of it, in the Winter following 1711, so far short of the Expences, that he was driven to attend

his Fortune in some more favourable Climate, where he remain'd twenty Years an Exile, from his Friends, and Country ; tho' there has been scarce an *English* Gentleman, who in his *Tour of France*, or *Italy*, has not renew'd, or created an Acquaintance with him. As this is a Circumstance, that many People may have forgot, I cannot remember it, without that Regard, and Concern it deserves from all that know him : Yet it is some Mitigation of his Misfortune, that since his Return to *England*, his grey Hairs, and cheerful Disposition have still found a general Welcome among his foreign, and former domestick Acquaintance.

*Collier* being now, first-commission'd Manager with the Comedians, drove them too, to the last Inch of a hard Bargain (the natural Consequence of all Treaties between Power, and Necessity) He not only demanded six hundred a Year, neat Money, the Price at which he had farm'd out his Opera, and to make the Business a *sine Cure* to him ; but likewise insisted, upon a Moiety of the two hundred, that had been levied upon us the Year before, in Aid of the Operas ; in all 700*l*. These large and ample Conditions, considering in what Hands we were, we resolv'd to swallow without wry Faces ; rather chusing to run any Hazard, than contend with a formidable Power, against which we had no Remedy : But so it happen'd, that Fortune took better Care of our Interest, than we ourselves had like to have done : For had *Collier* accepted of our first Offer, of an equal Share with us ; he had got three hundred Pounds a Year more by complying with it, than by the Sum he impos'd upon us ; our Shares being never less, than a thousand annually, to each of us, till the End of the Queen's Reign, in 1714. After which *Collier's* Commission was superseded ; his Theatrical Post, upon the Accession of his late Majesty, being given to Sir *Richard Steele*.

From these various Revolutions, in the Government of the Theatre, all owing to the Patentees mistaken Principle of increasing their Profits, by too far enslaving their People, and keeping down the

the Price of good Actors (and I could almost insist, that giving large Salaries to bad Ones, could not have had a worse Consequence) I say, when it is consider'd, that the Authority for acting Plays, &c. was thought of so little worth, that (as has been observ'd) Sir *Thomas Skipwith* gave away his Share of it, and the Adventurers had fled from it; that Mr. *Congreve*, at another time, had voluntarily resign'd it and Sir *John Vanburgh* (meerly to get the Rent of his new House paid) had, by Leave of the Court, farm'd out his License to *Swiney*, who not without some Hesitation had ventur'd upon it; let me say again, out of this low Condition of the Theatre, was it not owing to the Industry of three, or four Comedians, that a new Place was now created for the Crown to give away, without any Expence attending it, well worth the Acceptance of any Gentleman, whose Merit, or Services had no higher Claim to Preferment, and which *Collier*, and Sir *Richard Steele*, in the two last Reigns, successively enjoy'd? Though, I believe, I may have said something like this, in a former Chapter, I am not unwilling it should be twice taken notice of.

We are now come to that firm Establishment of the Theatre, which except the Admittance of *Booth* into a Share, and *Dogget's* retiring from it, met with no Change, or Alteration, for above twenty Years after.

*Collier*, as has been said, having accepted of a certain Appointment of seven hundred *per Annum*; *Wilks*, *Dogget*, and Myself were now the only acting Managers, under the Queen's License; which being a Grant, but during Pleasure, oblig'd us to a Conduct that might not undervalue that Favour. At this Time we were all in the Vigour of our Capacities as Actors; and our Prosperity enabled us, to pay, at least double the Salaries, to what the same Actors had usually receiv'd, or could have hoped for under the Government of the Patentees. *Dogget*, who was naturally an Oeconomist, kept our Expences, and Accounts to the best of his Power, within regulated

Bounds, and Moderation. *Wilks*, who had a stronger Passion, for Glory, than *Lucre*, was a little apt to be lavish in what was not always as necessary for the Profit, as the Honour of the Theatre: For Example, at the Beginning of almost every Season, he would order two, or three Suits to be made, or refresh'd, for Actors of moderate Consequence, that is having constantly a new one for himself, might seem less particular, tho' he had, as yet, no new Part for it. This expeditious Care of doing us good, without waiting for our Consent to it, *Dogget* always look'd upon, with the Eye of a Man, in Pain: But I, who hated Pain, (tho' I as little liked the Favour, as *Dogget* himself) rather chose to laugh at the Circumstance, than complain of what I knew was not to be cured, but by a Remedy, worse than the Evil. Upon these Occasions, therefore, whenever I saw him, and his Followers so prettily dress'd out for an old Play, I only commended his Fancy; or at most but whisper'd him not to give himself so much Trouble, about others, upon whose Performance it would but be thrown away: To which with a smiling Air of Triumph, over my want of Penetration, he has reply'd—Why, now, that was what I really did it for! to shew others, that I love to take care of them, as well as of myself. Thus whenever he made himself easy, he had not the least Conception, let the Expence be what it would, that we could possibly dislike it. And from the same Principle, provided a thinner Audience were liberal of their Applause, he gave himself little Concern about the Receipt of it. As in these different Tempers of my Brother-Managers, there might be equally something right, and wrong, it was equally my Business to keep well with them both: And tho' of the two, I was rather inclin'd to *Dogget's* way of thinking, yet I was always under the disagreeable Restraint of not letting *Wilks* see it: Therefore, when in any material Point of Management, they were ready to come to a Rupture, I found it adviseable to think neither of them, absolutely in the wrong; but by giving to one as much of the Right, in his Opinion  
this



this way, as I took from the other in that ; their Differences were sometimes soft'ned into Concessions, that I have Reason to think prevented many ill Consequences, in our Affairs, that otherwise might have attended them. But this was always to be done with a very gentle Hand ; for as *Wilks* was apt to be easily hurt by Opposition, so when he felt it he was as apt to be insupportable. However, there were some Points, in which we were always unanimous. In the twenty Years, while we were our own Directors, we never had a Creditor that had Occasion to come twice for his Bill ; every *Monday* Morning discharged us of all Demands, before we took a Shilling for our own Use. And from this Time, we neither ask'd any Actor, nor were desired by them, to sign any written Agreement (to the best of my Memory) whatsoever : The Rate of their respective Salaries were only enter'd in our daily Pay-Roll ; which plain Record every one look'd upon, as good as City-Security : For where an honest Meaning is mutual, the mutual Confidence will be Bond enough, in Conscience, on both sides : But that I may not ascribe more to our Conduct than was really its Due, I ought to give Fortune her share of the Commendation ; for had not our Success exceeded our Expectation, it might not have been in our Power, so thoroughly to have observ'd those laudable Rules of Oeconomy, Justice, and Lenity, which so happily supported us : But the Severities, and Oppressions we had suffer'd under our former Masters, made us incapable of imposing them upon others ; which gave our whole Society the chearful Looks of a rescued People. But notwithstanding this general Cause of Content, it was not above a Year or two before the Imperfection of human Nature began to shew itself in contrary Symptoms. The Merit of the Hazards which the Managers had run, and the Difficulties they had combated, in bringing to perfection, that Revolution, by which they had all so amply profited, in the Amendment of their general Income, began now to be forgotten ; their Acknowledgments, and thankful Promises of Fidelity, were no more re-

peated, or scarce thought obligatory : Ease and Plenty, by an habitual Enjoyment, had lost their Novelty, and the Largeness of their Salaries, seem'd rather lessen'd than advanc'd, by the extraordinary Gains of the Undertakers ; for that is the Scale, in which the hired Actor will always weigh his Performance ; but whatever Reason there may seem to be, in his Case, yet as he is frequent apt to throw a little Self-partiality into the Ballance, that Consideration may a good deal alter the Justness of it. While the Actors, therefore, had this way of thinking, happy was it, for the Menagers, that their united Interest was so inseparably the same, and that their Skill and power in Acting, stood in a Rank so far above the rest, that if the whole Body of private Men had deserted them, it would yet have been an easier Matter, for the Menagers to have pick'd up Recruit, than to the Deserters to have found proper Officer to head them. Here, then, in this Distinction lay our Security : Our being Actors ourselves, was an advantage to our Government, which all former Menagers, which were only idle Gentlemen, wanted. Nor was our Establishment easily to be broken, while our Health, and Limbs enabled us, to be joint-labourers in the Work we were Masters of.

The only Actor, who, in the Opinion of the Publick, seem'd to have had a pretence of being advanc'd to a Share with us, was certainly *Booth* : But when it is consider'd, how strongly he had oppos'd the Measures, that had made us Menagers, by setting himself (as has been observ'd) at the Head of an opposite Interest, he could not as yet have much to complain of : Beside, if the Court had thought him, now, an equal Object of Favour, it could not have been in our power, to have oppos'd his Preferment : this I mention, not to take from his Merit, but to shew, from what Cause it was not, as yet, better provided for. Therefore it may be no Vanity to say, our having at that time, no visible Competitors on the Stage, was the only Interest, that rais'd us to be the Menagers of it.

But

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 259

But here, let me rest a while, and since, at my time of Day, our best Possessions are but Ease, and Quiet, I must be content, if I will have Sallies of Pleasure, to take up with those only, that are to be found in Imagination. When I look back, therefore, on the Storms of the Stage, we had been toss'd in; when I consider, that various Vicissitude of Hopes and Fears, we had for twenty Years struggled with, and found our selves, at last thus safely set on Shore, to enjoy the Produce of our own Labours; and to have rais'd those Labours by our Skill, and Industry, to a much fairer Profit, than our Task-Masters, by all their severe, and griping Government had ever reap'd from them, a good-natured Reader, that is not offend-ed at the Comparison of great things, with small, will allow was a Triumph, in proportion, equal to those, that have attended the most heroick Enter-prizes for Liberty! What Transport could the first *Brutus* feel, upon his Expulsion of the *Tarquins*, greater than that which now danc'd in the Heart of a poor Actor, who from an injur'd Labourer, unpaid his Hire, had made himself, without Guilt, a legal Ma-nager of his own Fortune? Let the Grave and Great condemn, or yawn at these low Conceits, but let me be happy, in the Enjoyment of them! 'Tis this Hour my Memory runs o'er that pleasing prospect of Life past, with little less Delight, than when I was first, in the real Possession of it. This is the natural Temper of my Mind, which my Acquaintance are frequently Witnesses of, and as this, was all the Am-bition, Providence had made my obscure Condition capable of, I am thankful, that Means were given me to enjoy the Fruits of it.

———*Hoc est*  
*Vivere bis, vitâ posse priore frui.*

Something like the Meaning of this, the less learned Reader may find in my Title Page.

CHAP.

## C H A P. XIV.

*The Stage, in its highest Prosperity. The Managers not without Errors. Of what Kind. Cato first acted. What brought it to the Stage. The Company go to Oxford, Their Success, and different Auditors there. Booth made a Sharer. Dogget objects to him. Quits the Stage upon his Admittance. That not his true Reason. What was. Dogget's Theatrical Character.*

**N**Otwithstanding the Managing Actors were, now, in a happier Situation, than their utmost Pretensions could have expected; yet it is not to be suppos'd, but wiser Men might have mended it. As we could not all govern our selves, there were Seasons, when we were not all fit to govern others. Our Passions, and our Interest drew not always the same way. *Self*, had a great Sway in our Debates: We had our Partialities; our Prejudices; our Favorites of less Merit; and our Jealousies of those who came too near us; Frailties, which Societies of higher Consideration, while they are compos'd of Men, will not always be free from. To have been constantly capable of Unanimity, had been a Blessing too great for our Station: One Mind, among three People, were to have had three Masters to one Servant; but when that one Servant is called three different ways, at the same time, whose Business is to be done first? For my own Part, I was forced, almost all my Life, to give up my Share of him. And if I could by Art, or persuasion, hinder others from making, what I thought, a wrong use of their Power, it was the all, and utmost I desired. Yet whatever might be our personal Errors, I shall think I have no Right to speak of them farther, than where the publick Entertainment was affected by them.

them. If therefore among so many, some particular Actors were remarkable in any part of their private Lives, that might sometimes make the World merry without Doors; I hope my laughing Friends will excuse me, if I do not so far comply, with their Desires, or Curiosity, as to give them a Place, in my History. I can only recommend such Anecdotes to the Amusement of a Noble Person, who (in case I conceal them) does me the flattering Honour to threaten my Work, with a Supplement. 'Tis enough for me, that such Actors had their Merits, to the Publick: Let those recite their Imperfections, who are themselves without them: It is my Misfortune not to have that Qualification. Let us see, then (whatever was amiss in it) how our Administration went forward,

When we were first invested, with this Power; the Joy of our so unexpectedly coming into it, kept us for some time, in Amity, and Good-humour, with one another: And the Pleasure of reforming the many false Measures, Absurdities, and Abuses that like Weeds had suck'd up the due Nourishment from the Fruits of the Theatre, gave us, as yet, no leisure, for private Dissentions. Our daily Receipts exceeded our Imagination: And we seldom met, as a Board to settle our weekly Accounts, without the Satisfaction of Joint-Heirs, just in Possession of an unexpected Estate, that had been distantly intail'd upon them. Such a sudden Change of our Condition, it may be imagined, could not but throw out of us a new Spirit, in almost every Play we appear'd in: Nor did we ever sink into that common Negligence, which is apt to follow Good-fortune: Indultry, we knew, was the Life of our Business; that it not only conceal'd Faults, but was of equal Value to greater Talents without it; which the Decadance once of *Betterton's* Company in *Lincoln's-Inn-Fields*, had lately shewn us a Proof of.

This then was that happy Period, when both Actors and Managers were in their highest Enjoyment of general Content, and Prosperity. Now it was that the politer World too, by their decent Attention, their  
sensible



sensible Taste, and their generous Encouragements to Authors and Actors, once more saw, that the Stage, under a due Regulation, was capable of being what the wisest Ages thought it *might* be, The most rational Scheme, that human Wit could form to dissipate, with Innocence, the Cares of Life; to allure even the Turbulent, or Ill-disposed from worse Meditations, and to give the leisure Hours of Business, and Virtue, an instructive Recreation.

If this grave Assertion is less recommended, by falling from the Pen of a Comedian; I must appeal for the Truth of it, to the Tragedy of *Cato*, which was first acted in 1712. I submit to the Judgment of those, who were then the sensible Spectators of it, if the Success, and Merit of that Play, was not an Evidence of every Article of that Value, which I have given to a decent Theatre? But (as I was observing) it could not be expected the Summer-Days, I am speaking of, could be the constant Weather of the Year; we had our clouded Hours, as well as our Sun-shine, and were not always in the same Good-humour with one another: Fire, Air and Water, could not be more vexatiously opposite, than the different Tempers of the Three Managers, though they might equally have their useful, as well as their destructive Qualities. How variously these Elements, in our several Dispositions, operated, may be judg'd from the following single Instance, as well as from a thousand others; which, if they were all to be told, might possibly make my Reader wish I had forgot them.

Much about this Time, then, there came over from the *Dublin*-Theatre two uncelebrated Actors, to pick up a few Pence among us, in the Winter, as *Wilks* had a Year, or two before, done on the other side the Water, in the Summer. But it was not so clear to *Dogget*, and my self, that it was in their Power, to do us the same Service in *Drury-Lane*, as *Wilks* might have done them, in *Dublin*. However *Wilks* was so much a Man of Honour, that he scorn'd to be outdone in the least Point of it, let the Cost be what it would,

to his Fellow-Managers, who had no particular Accounts of Honour open with them. To acquit himself therefore with a better Grace, *Wilks* so order'd it, that his *Hibernian* Friends were got upon our Stage, before any other Manager had well heard of their Arrival. This so generous Dispatch of their Affair, gave *Wilks* a very good Chance of convincing his Friends, that himself was sole Master of the Masters of the Company. Here now, the different Elements in our Tempers began to work with us. While *Wilks* was only animated by a grateful Hospitality to his Friends, *Dogget* was ruffled into a Storm, and look'd upon this Generosity, as so much Insult, and Injustice upon himself, and the Fraternity during this Disorder, I stood by, a seeming quiet Passenger, and, since talking to the Winds, I knew could be to no great Purpose, (whatever Weakness it might be call'd) could not help smiling, to observe with what officious Ease, and Delight, *Wilks* was treating his Friends at our Expence, who were scarce acquainted with them: For it seems, all this was to end in their having a Benefit-Play, in the Height of the Season, for the unprofitable Service they had done us, without our Consent or Desire to employ them. Upon this *Dogget* bounc'd, and grew almost as untractable as *Wilks* himself. Here again, I was forc'd to clap my Patience to the Helm, to weather this difficult Point between them: Applying myself therefore to the Person I imagin'd was most likely to hear me, I desir'd *Dogget*, "to consider, that I  
" must naturally, be as much hurt, by this vain, and  
" over-bearing Behaviour of *Wilks*, as he could be;  
" and tho' it was true, these Actors, had no Pretence,  
" to the Favour design'd them; yet we could not say  
" they had done us any farther Harm, than letting the  
" Town see the Parts they had been shewn in, had  
" been better done by those, to whom they properly  
" belong'd: Yet as we had greatly profited, by the  
" extraordinary Labour of *Wilks*, who acted long  
" Parts almost every Day, and at least twice to *Dog-*  
" *get's* once, and that I granted it might not be so  
much

“ much his Consideration of our common Interest, as  
 “ his Fondness for Applause, that set him to work ;  
 “ yet even that Vanity, if he supposed it such, had its  
 “ Merit to us ; and as we had found our Account in  
 “ it, it would be folly upon a Punctilio, to tempt the  
 “ Rashness of a Man, who was capable to undo all  
 “ he had done, by any Act of Extravagance, that  
 “ might fly into his Head : That admitting this Be-  
 “ nefit might be some little Loss to us, yet to break  
 “ with him upon it, could not but beten times of worse  
 “ Consequence, than our overlooking his disagreeable  
 “ manner of making the Demand upon us.

Tho' I found, this had made *Dogget* drop the Seve-  
 rity of his Features, yet he endeavoured still to seem  
 uneasy by his starting a new Objection, which was,  
 That we could not be sure even of the Charge, they  
 were to pay for it : For *Wilks*, said he, you know  
 will go any Lengths, to make it a good Day to them,  
 and may whisper the Door-keepers, to give them the  
 Ready-money taken, and return the Account, in such  
 Tickets only, as these Actors, have not themselves dis-  
 pon'd of. To make this easy too, I gave him my Word to  
 be answerable for the Charge, my self. Upon this he ac-  
 ceded, and accordingly they had the Benefit-Play. But  
 so it happen'd (whether as *Dogget* had suspected,  
 or not, I cannot say) the Ready-Money receiv'd fell  
 Ten Pounds short of the Sum, they had agreed to pay  
 for it. Upon the *Saturday* following, (the Day on  
 which we constantly made up our Accounts) I went  
 early to the Office, and inquir'd, if the Ten Pounds  
 had yet been paid in ; but not hearing that one Shil-  
 ling of it had found its way thither, I immediately  
 supply'd the Sum out of my own Pocket, and direct-  
 ed the Treasurer to charge it receiv'd from me, in the  
 deficient Receipt of the Benefit-Day. Here, now, it  
 might be imagined, all this silly Matter was accom-  
 modated, and that no one could so properly say, he  
 was aggrieved, as my self : But let us observe what  
 the Consequence says — Why, the Effect of my in-  
 solvent

solent interposing, honesty prov'd to be this : That the Party most oblig'd, was the most offended ; and the Offence was imputed to me, who had been Ten Pounds out of Pocket, to be able to commit it : For when *Wilks* found, in the Account, how spitefully the Ten Pounds had been paid in, he took me aside, into the adjacent Stone-Passage, and with some Warmth ask'd me, What I meant by pretending to pay in this Ten Pounds ? and that, for his part, he did not understand such Treatment. To which I reply'd, That tho' I was amazed, at his thinking himself ill-treated, I would give him a plain, justifiable Answer. — That I had given my Word to *Dogget*, the Charge of the Benefit should be fully paid, and since his Friends had neglected it, I found my self bound to make it good. Upon which he told me, I found my self bound to make it good. Upon which he told me, I was mistaken, if I thought, he did not see into the bottom of all this — That *Dogget*, and I, were always endeavouring to thwart and make him uneasy ; but he was able to stand upon his own Legs, and we should find he would not be us'd so : That he took this Payment of the Ten Pounds, as an Insult upon him and a Slight to his Friends ; but rather than suffer it, he would tear the whole Business to Pieces : That I knew it was in his Power to do it ; and if he could not do a civil thing to a Friend, without all this senseless Rout about it, he could be receiv'd in *Ireland* upon his own Terms, and could as easily mend a Company there as he had done here : That if he were gone, *Dogget* and I would not be able to keep the Doors open a Week, and by G——, he would not be a Drudge for nothing. As I knew all this was but the Foam of the high Value he had set upon himself, I thought it not amiss, to seem a little silently concern'd, for the helpless Condition, to which his Resentment of the Injury I have related, was going to reduce us : For I knew I had a Friend, in his Heart, that, if I gave him a little Time to cool, would soon bring him to Reason : The sweet Morfel of a thousand Pounds a Year, was not to be met with

at every Table, and might tempt a nicer Palate than his own, to swallow it, when he was not out of Humour. This I knew would always be of weight with him, when the best Arguments I could use, would be of none. I therefore gave him no farther Provocation, than by gravely telling him, We all had it in our Power to do one another a Mischief; but I believ'd none of us much car'd to hurt ourselves; that if he was not of my Opinion, it would not be in my Power, to hinder whatever new Scheme, he might resolve upon; that *London* would always have a Play-house, and I should have some Chance in it, tho' it might not be so good as it had been; that he might be sure, if I had thought my paying in the Ten Pounds could have been so ill receiv'd; I should have been glad to have sav'd it. Upon this he seem'd to mutter something to himself, and walk'd off, as if he had a mind to be alone. I took the Occasion and return'd to *Dogget*, to finish our Accounts. In about six Minutes *Wilks* came in to us; not in the best Humour, it may be imagin'd; yet not in so ill a one, but that he took his Share of the Ten Pounds, without shewing the least Contempt of it; which, had he been proud enough to have refus'd, or to have paid in himself, I might have thought, he intended to make good his Menaces, and that the Injury I had done him would never have been forgiven; but, it seems we had different Ways of thinking.

Of this kind, more or less delightful, was the Life I led, with this impatient Man, for full twenty Years. *Dogget*, as we shall find, could not hold it so long; but as he had more Money than I, he had not Occasion for so much Philosophy. And thus were our Theatrical Affairs frequently disconcerted, by this irascible Commander, this *Achilles* of our Confederacy; who, I may be bold to say, came very little short of the Spirit *Horace* gives to that Hero in his——

*Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer.*

'This, then, is one of those personal Anecdotes of our  
Variances,



*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 267

Variances, which, as our publick Performances were affected by it, could not with regard to Truth, and Justice, be omitted.

From this Time to the Year 1712, my Memory from which Repository alone, every Article of what I write is collected) has nothing worth mentioning, 'till the first acting of the Tragedy of *Cato*. As to the Play itself, it might be enough to say, 'That the Author and the Actors had their different Hopes of Fame and Profit, amply answer'd by the Performance; but as its Success was attended with remarkable Consequences, it may not be amiss to trace it, from its several Years Concealment, in the Closet, to the Stage.

In 1703, nine Years before it was acted, I had the Pleasure of reading the first four Acts (which was all of it then written) privately with Sir *Richard Steele*: It may be needless, to say it was impossible to lay them out of my Hand, 'till I had gone thro' them; or to dwell upon the Delight, his Friendship to the Author receiv'd, upon my being so warmly pleas'd with them: But my Satisfaction was as highly disappointed, when he told me, Whatever Spirit Mr. *Addison* had shewn, in his writing it he doubted, he would never have Courage enough, to let his *Cato* stand the Censure of an *English* Audience; that it had only been the Amusement of his leisure Hours in *Italy*, and was never intended for the Stage. This Poetical Diffidence Sir *Richard* himself spoke of with some Concern, and in the Transport of his Imagination, could not help saying, *Good God! what a Part would Betterton make of Cato!* But this was seven Years before *Betterton* died, and when *Booth* (who afterwards made his Fortune by acting it) was in his Theatrical Minority. In the latter end of *Queen Anne's* Reign, when our National Politicks had changed Hands; the Friends of Mr. *Addison*, then thought it a proper Time to animate the Publick with the Sentiments of *Cato*; in a Word, their Importunities were too warm, to be resisted; and it was no sooner finish'd, than hurried to the Stage, in *April* 1712, at a time when three Days

a Week were usually appointed for the Benefit-Plays of particular Actors : But a Work of that critical Importance, was to make its way, through all private Considerations ; nor could it possibly give place to a Custom, which the Breach of could very little prejudice the Benefits, that on so unavoidable an Occasion, were (in part, tho' not wholly) postpon'd : it was therefore *Mondays* excepted) acted every Day for a Month, to constantly crowded Houses. As the Author had made us a Present of whatever Profits he might have claim'd from it, we thought our selves oblig'd to spare no Cost, in the proper Decorations of it. Its coming so late in the Season, to the Stage, prov'd of particular Advantage, to the sharing Actors ; because the Harvest of our annual Gains was generally over, before the middle of *March* ; many select Audiences being then usually reserv'd, in favour to the Benefit of private Actors ; which fixt Engagements naturally abated the Receipts of the Days before and after them : But this unexpected After-crop of *Cato*, largely supplied to us, those Deficiencies ; and was almost equal to two fruitful Seasons, in the same Year ; at the Close of which, the three menaging Actors found themselves, each a Gainer of thirteen hundred and fifty Pounds : But to return to the first Reception of this Play from the Publick.

Although *Cato* seems plainly written upon what are called *Whig* Principles ; yet the *Tories* of that Time had Sense enough not to take it, as the least Reflection, upon their Administration ; but on the contrary, they seem'd to brandish, and vaunt their Approbation of every Sentiment in favour of Liberty, which by a publick Act of their Generosity, was carried so high, that one Day, while the Play was acting, they collected fifty Guineas in the Boxes, and made a Present of them to *Booth*, with this Compliment.——For his honest Opposition to a perpetual Dictator ; and his dying so bravely in the Cause of Liberty : What was intimated by any Part of these Words, is not my Affair ; but so publick a Reward had the Appearance of a laudable Spirit, which only such a Play, as *Cato*, could have

have inspired; nor could *Booth* be blam'd, if upon so particular a Distinction of his Merit, he began himself to set more Value upon it: How far he might carry it, in making use of the Favour he stood in, with a certain Nobleman, then in Power, at Court, was not difficult to penetrate; and indeed, ought always to have been expected by the menaging Actors: For which of them (making the Case every way his own) could with such Advantages, have contented himself, in the humble Station of an hired Actor? But let us see how the Menagers stood severally affected, upon this Occasion.

*Dogget*, who expected, though he fear'd not, the Attempt of what after happen'd, imagin'd he had thought of an Expedient to prevent it: And to cover his Design with all the Art of a Statesman, he insinuated to us (for he was a staunch *Whig*) that this Present of fifty Guineas, was a sort of a *Tory* Triumph, which they had no Pretence to; and that for his Part, he could not bear, that so redoubted a Champion for Liberty, as *Cato*, should be bought off, to the Cause of a contrary Party: He therefore, in the seeming Zeal of his Heart, propos'd, that the Menagers themselves should make the same Present to *Booth*, which had been made him from the Boxes the Day before. This, he said, would recommend the Equality, and liberal Spirit of our Menagement, to the Town, and might be a means, to secure *Booth* more firmly in our Interest; it never having been known, that the Skill of the best Actor had receiv'd so round a Reward, or Gratuity, in one Day, before. *Wilks*, who wanted nothing but Abilities to be as cunning as *Dogget*, was so charm'd with the Proposal, that he long'd, that Moment, to make *Booth* the Present with his own Hands; and though he knew he had no Right to do it without my Consent, had not Patience to ask it; upon which I turn'd to *Dogget*, with a cold Smile, and told him, that if *Booth* could be purchas'd at so cheap a Rate, it would be one of the best Proofs of his Oeconomy, we had ever been beholden to: I therefore desired we might have a little Patience; that

our doing it too hastily might be only making sure of an Occasion to throw the fifty Guineas away ; for if we should be oblig'd to do better for him, we could never expect, that *Booth* would think himself bound in Honour, to refund them. This seem'd so absurd an Argument to *Wilks*, that he began with his usual Freedom of Speech, to treat it, as a pitiful Evasion of their intended Generosity : But *Dogget*, who was not so wide of my Meaning, clapping his Hand upon mine, said, with an Air of Security, O! don't trouble yourself! there must be two Words to that Bargain; let me alone, to manage that Matter. *Wilks*, upon this dark Discourse, grew uneasy, as if there were some Secret between us, that he was to be left out of. Therefore to avoid the Shock of his Intemperance, I was reduc'd to tell him that it was my Opinion, that *Booth* would never be made easy, by any Thing we could do for him, till he had a Share in the Profits, and Menagement; and that as he did not want Friends to assist him, whatever his Merit might be before, every one would think, since his acting of *Cato*, he had now enough to back his Pretensions to it. To which *Dogget* reply'd, that nobody could think his Merit was slighted, by so handsome a Present, as fifty Guineas; and that for his farther Pretensions, whatever the License might avail, our Property of House, Scenes, and Cloaths were our own, and not in the Power of the Crown to dispose of. To conclude, my Objections, that the Money would only be thrown away, &c. were overrul'd, and the same Night *Booth* had the fifty Guineas, which he receiv'd with a Thankfulness, that made *Wilks*, and *Dogget* perfectly easy; insomuch that they seem'd, for some time to triumph in their Conduct, and often endeavour'd to laugh my Jealousy out of Countenance: But in the following Winter, the Game happen'd to take a different Turn; and then if it had been a laughing Matter, I had as strong an Occasion to smile at their former Security. But before I make an End of this Matter, I cannot pass over the good Fortune of the Company, that follow'd

us to the Act at *Oxford*, which was held in the intervening Summer: Perhaps too, a short View of the Stage, in that different Situation, may not be unacceptable to the Curious.

After the Restauration of King *Charles*, before the *Cavalier*, and *Round-head* Parties, under their new Denomination of *Whig*, and *Tory*, began again to be politically troublesome, publick Acts at *Oxford* (as I find by the Date of several Prologues written by *Dryden*, for *Hart* on those Occasions) had been more frequently held, than in latter Reigns. Whether the same Party-Dissentions may have occasion'd the Discontinuance of them, is a Speculation, not necessary to be enter'd into. But these Academical Jubilees have usually been look'd upon as a kind of congratulatory Compliment, to the Accession of every new Prince, to the Throne, and generally as such have attended them. King *James*, notwithstanding his Religion, had the Honour of it; at which the Players, as usual, assisted. This I have only mentioned, to give the Reader a Theatrical Anecdote of the Liberty, which *Tony Leigh* the Comedian took with the Character of the well known *Obadiab Walker*, then Head of *University College*, who, in that Prince's Reign, had turn'd *Roman Catholick*: The Circumstance is this.

In the later End of the Comedy call'd the *Committee*, *Leigh*, who acted the Part of *Teague*, hauling *Obadiab*, with an Halter about his Neck, whom, according to his written Part, he was to threaten to hang, for no better Reason than his refusing to drink the King's Health, (but here *Leigh*) to justify his Purpose, with a stronger Provocation, put himself into a more than ordinary Heat, with his Captive *Obadiab*, which having heightned his Master's Curiosity, to know what *Obadiab* had done to deserve such Usage, *Leigh*, folding his Arms, with a ridiculous Stare of Astonishment, reply'd—*Upon my Shoule, he has shange his Religion*. As the Merit of this Jest lay chiefly in the Auditors sudden Application of it, to the *Obadiab* of *Oxford*, it was receiv'd with all the Triumph of Applause, which the Zeal of a different Religion could inspire.

But



But *Leigh* was given to understand, that the King was highly displeas'd at it, inasmuch, as it had shewn him, that the University was in a Temper to make a Jest of his Profelyte. But to return to the Conduct of our own Affairs there, in 1712.

It had been a Custom for the Comedians, while at *Oxford*, to act twice a Day; the first Play ending every Morning, before the College Hours of dining, and the other never to break into the Time of shutting their Gates in the Evening. This extraordinary Labour gave all the hired Actors a Title to double Pay, which, at the Act, in King *William's* Time, I had myself accordingly receiv'd there. But the present Managers considering, that by acting only once a Day, their Spirits might be fresher for every single Performance, and that by this Means, they might be able to fill up the Term of their Residence, without the Repetition of their best, and strongest Plays; and as their Theatre was contriv'd to hold a full third more, than the usual Form of it had done, one House well fill'd, might answer the Profits of two but moderately taken up: Being enabled too, by their late Success, at *London*, to make the Journey pleasant, and profitable, to the rest of their Society, they resolv'd to continue to them, their double Pay, notwithstanding this new Abatement of half their Labour. This Conduct of the Managers more than answer'd their Intention, which was rather to get nothing themselves, than not let their Fraternity be the better for the Expedition. Thus they laid an Obligation, upon their Company, and were themselves considerably, tho' unexpected, Gainers by it. But my chief Reason for bringing the Reader to *Oxford*, was to shew the different Taste of Plays there, from that which prevail'd at *London*. A great deal of that false, flashy Wit, and forc'd Humour, which had been the Delight of our Metropolitan Multitude, was only rated there at its bare, intrinsic Value; Applause was not to be purchas'd there, but by the true Sterling, the *Sal Atticum* of a Genius; unless where the Skill of the Actor pass'd it upon them, with some

extra-

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 273

extraordinary Strokes of Nature. *Shakespear*, and *Johnson* had, there, a sort of classical Authority; for whose masterly Scenes they seem'd to have as implicit a Reverence, as formerly, for the Ethicks of *Aristotle*; and were as incapable of allowing Moderns to be their Competitors, as of changing their academical Habits for gaudy Colours, or Embroidery. Whatever Merit, therefore, some few of our more politely-written Comedies might pretend to, they had not the same Effect upon the Imagination there, nor were receiv'd with that extraordinary Applause, they had met with, from the People of Mode, and Pleasure, in *London*; whose vain Accomplishments did not dislike themselves, in the Glass, that was held to them: The Elegant Follies of higher Life, were not, at *Oxford*, among their Acquaintance, and consequently might not be so good Company, to a learned Audience, as Nature, in her plain Dress, and unornamented, in her pursuits and Inclinations, seem'd to be.

The only distinguish'd Merit, allow'd to any modern Writer, was to the Author of *Cato*, which Play being the Flower of a Plant, rais'd in that learned Garden, (for there *Mr. Addison* had his Education) what Favour may we not suppose was due to him, from an audience of Brethren, who from that local Relation to him, might naturally have a warmer Pleasure, in their Benevolence to his Fame? But not to give more Weight to this imaginary Circumstance, than it may bear, the Fact was, that on our first Day of acting it, our House was, in a manner, invested; and Entrance demanded by twelve a Clock at Noon, and before one, it was not wide enough for many, who came too late for Places. The same Crowds continued for three Days together, (an uncommon Curiosity in that Place) and the Death of *Cato* triumph'd over the Injuries of *Cæsar*, every where. To conclude, our Reception at *Oxford*, whatever our Merit might be, exceeded our Expectation. At our taking Leave, we had the Thanks of the Vice-Chancellor, for the Decency, and Order, observ'd by our whole Society; an Honour which had not always been paid

paid, upon the same Occasions; for at the Act, in King *William's* Time, I remember some Pranks of a different Nature had been complain'd of. Our Receipts had not only enabled us (as I have observ'd) to double the Pay of every Actor, but to afford out of them, towards the Repair of *St Mary's Church*, the Contribution of fifty Pounds: Besides which, each of the three Menagers had to his respective Share clear of all Charges, one hundred and fifty more, for his one and twenty Day's Labour; which being added to his thirteen hundred, and fifty, shared in the Winter preceding, amounted, in the whole, to fifteen hundred; the greatest Sum ever known to have been shared, in one Year, to that Time: And to the Honour of our Auditors, here, and elsewhere be it spoken, all this was rais'd, without the Aid of those barbarous Entertainments, with which, some few Years after (upon the Re-establishment of two contending Companies) we were forc'd to disgrace the Stage, to support it.

This, therefore, is that remarkable Period, when the Stage, during my Time upon it, was the least reproachable; and it may be worth the publick Observation (if any thing I have said of it can be so) that *One Stage* may, as I have prov'd it has done, very laudably support it self, by such Spectacles only, as are fit to delight a sensible People; but the equal Prosperity of *Two Stages* has always been of a very short Duration. If therefore the Publick should ever recover, into the true Taste of that Time, and stick to it; the Stage must come into it, or *starve*; as whenever the general Taste is vulgar, the Stage must come down to it, to *live*.... But I ask pardon of the Multitude, who, in all Regulations of the Stage, may expect, to be a little indulg'd, in what they like: If therefore they *will* have a May-pole, why, the Players must *give* them a May-pole; but I only speak, in case they should keep an old Custom of changing their Minds; and by their Privilege of being in the *wrong*, should take a Fancy, by way of Variety, of being in the *right*.... Then,

in

in such a Case, what I have said may appear, to have been no intended Design, against their Liberty of judging for themselves.

After our Return, from *Oxford*, *Booth* was at full Leisure, to solicit his Admission, to a Share, in the Menagement; in which he succeeded, about the Beginning of the following Winter; accordingly a new License (recalling all former Licenses) was issued, wherein *Booth's* Name was added, to those of the other Menagers. But still, there was a Difficulty, in his Qualification, to be adjusted; what Consideration he should allow, for an equal Title to our Stock of Cloaths, Scenes, &c. without which, the License was of no more use, than the Stock was without the License; or, at least, if there were any Difference, the former Menagers seem'd to have the Advantage in it; the Stock being entirely theirs, and three Parts in four of the License; for *Collier*, though now but a fifth Manager, still insisted on his former Appointment of 700*l.* a Year; which in Equity ought certainly to have been proportionably abated; But Court-Favour was not always measur'd by *that* Yard; *Collier's* Matter was soon out of the Question; his Pretensions were too visible, to be contested; but the Affair of *Booth* was not so clear a Point: The Lord-Chamberlain, therefore, only recommended it, to be adjusted, among our selves; which to say the Truth, at that Time, was a greater Indulgence than I expected. Let us see, then, how this critical Case was handled.

*Wilks* was of Opinion, that to set a good round Value upon our Stock, was the only way, to come near an Equivalent, for the Diminution of our Shares, which the Admission of *Booth* must occasion: But *Dogget* insisted, that he had no Mind to dispose of any Part of his Property, and therefore would set no Price upon it at all. Though I allow'd, that both these Opinions might be grounded, on a good deal of Equity, yet I was not sure that either of them was practicable; and therefore told them, that when they could Both agree, which of them could be made so, they might

might rely on my Consent, in any Shape. In the mean time, I desir'd they would consider, that as our License subsisted only during Pleasure, we could not pretend, that the Queen might not recal, or alter it: But that to speak out, without mincing the Matter on either Side, the Truth was plainly this: That *Booth* had a manifest Merit, as an Actor; and as he was not supposed to be a *Whig*, it was as evident, that a good deal for that Reason, a Secretary of State had taken him into his Protection, which I was afraid the weak pretence of our invaded Property, would not be able to contend with: That his having signaliz'd himself, in the Character of *Cato* (whose Principles the *Tories* had affected to have taken into their own Possession) was a very popular pretence of making him free of the Stage, by advancing him to the Profits of it. And, as we had seen, that the Stage was frequently treated, as if it was not suppos'd, to have any Property at all; this Favour intended to *Booth* was thought a right Occasion, to avow that Opinion, by disposing of its Property, at Pleasure; But be that, as it might, I own'd, it was not so much my Apprehensions of what the Court might do, that sway'd me, into an Accommodation with *Booth*, as what the Town, (in whose Favour he now apparently stood) might think ought to be done: That, there might be more danger in contelling their arbitray Will, and pleasure, than in disputing this less terrible Strain of the Prerogative. That if *Booth* were only impos'd upon us, from his Merit to the Court, we were then in the Condition of other Subjects: Then, indeed, Law, Right and Possession, might have a tolerable Tug, for our Property: But as the Town would always look upon his Merit to *them*, in a stronger Light, and be Judges of it themselves, it would be a weak, and idle Endeavour, in us, not to sail with the Stream, when we might possibly make a Merit of our chearfully admitting him: That though his former Opposition to our Interest, might, between Man and Man, a good deal justify our not making an earlier Friend of him; yet that was a Disobligation,



tion, out of the Town's Regard, and consequently would be of no weight against so approv'd an Actor's being prefer'd. But all this, notwithstanding, if they could both agree, in a different Opinion, I would, at the Hazard of any Consequence, be guided by it.

Here now, will be shewn another Instance of our different Tempers; *Dogget* (who in all Matters, that concern'd our common Weal, and Interest, little regarded our Opinion, and even to an Obstinacy, walked by his own) look'd only out of Humour, at what I had said, and without thinking himself oblig'd to give any Reason for it, declar'd he would maintain his Property. *Wilks*, (who upon the same Occasions, was as remarkably ductile, as when his Superiority on the Stage, was in question, he was assuming, and intractable, said, for his Part, provided our Business of acting was not interrupted, he did not care what we did: But, in short, he was for playing on, come what would of it. This last part of his Declaration I did not dislike, and therefore I desired, we might all enter into an immediate Treaty with *Booth*, upon the Terms of his Admission. *Dogget* still sullenly reply'd, that he had no Occasion, to enter into any Treaty. *Wilks* then, to soften him, propos'd, that, if I liked it, *Dogget* might undertake it himself. I agreed. No! he would not be concern'd in it. I then offer'd the same Trust to *Wilks*, if *Dogget* approv'd of it. *Wilks* said, he was not good at making of Bargains, but if I was willing he would rather leave it to me. *Dogget*, at this, rose up, and said, we might both do as we pleas'd, but that nothing but the Law, should make him part with his Property--- and so went out of the Room. After which he never came among us more, either as an Actor or Manager.

By his having, in this abrupt manner, abdicated his Post, in our Government; what he left of it, naturally devolv'd, upon *Wilks*, and myself. However, this did not so much distress our Affair, as I have Reason to believe *Dogget* thought it would: For though, by

our Indentures tripartite, we could not dispose of his Property, without his Consent: Yet those Indentures could not oblige us to fast, because he had no Appetite; and if the Mill did not grind, we could have no Bread: We therefore determin'd, at any Hazard, to keep our Business still going, and that our safest way would be, to make the best Bargain we could with *Booth*; one Article of which was to be, That *Booth* should stand equally answerable with us, to *Dogget*, for the Consequence, to which *Booth* made no Objection, and the rest of his Agreement, was to allow us Six Hundred Pounds for his Share, in our Property, which was to be paid by such Sums as should arise from half his Profits of Acting, 'till the whole was discharg'd: Yet so cautious were we in this Affair, that this Agreement was only Verbal on our Part, tho' written, and sign'd by *Booth* as what intirely contented him: However, Bond and Judgment, could not have made it more secure, to him; for he had his Share, and was able to discharge the Incumbrance upon it, by his Income of that Year only. Let us see what *Dogget* did in this Affair, after he had left us.

Might it not be imagin'd, that *Wilks*, and Myself, by having made this Matter easy to *Booth*, should have deserv'd the Approbation at least, if not the Favour of the Court, that had exerted so much Power to prefer him? But shall I be believed, when I affirm, that *Dogget*, who had so strongly oppos'd the Court, in his admission to a Share, was very near getting the better of us both, upon that Account, and for some time appeared to have more Favour there, than either of us? Let me tell out my Story, and then think what you please of it.

*Dogget*, who was equally oblig'd, with us, to act, upon the Stage, as to assist, in the Management of it, tho' he had refus'd to do either, still demanded of us his whole Share of the Profits, without considering what part of them *Booth* might pretend to, from our late Concessions. After many fruitless Endeavours to bring him back, to us; *Booth* join'd with us, in making him an Offer of half a Share, if he had a mind  
totally

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 279

totally to quit the Stage, and make it a *Sine cure*. No! he wanted the Whole, and to fit still himself, while we (if we pleased) might work for him, or let it alone, and none of us all, neither he, nor we, be the better for it. What we imagin'd encourag'd him to hold us at this short Defiance, was, that he had laid up enough to live upon, without the Stage (for he was one of those close Oeconomists, whom Prodigals call a Miser) and therefore partly from an Inclination, as an invincible *Whig*, to signalize himself in defence of his Property, and as much presuming that our Necessities would oblige us to come to his own Terms, he was determin'd (even against the Opinion of his Friends) to make no other Peace, with us. But not being able, by this inflexible perseverance, to have his wicked Will of us, he was resolv'd to go to the Fountain-head of his own Distress, and try, if from thence, he could turn the Current against us. He appeal'd to the Vice-Chamberlain, to whose Direction, the adjusting of all these Theatrical Difficulties, was then committed: But there, I dare say, the Reader does not expect he should meet with much Favour: However, be that, as it may; for whether any regard was had, to his having some Thousands, in his Pocket; or that he was consider'd, as a Man, who would, or could make more Noise, in the Matter, than Courtiers might Care for: Or what Charms, Spells, or Conjurations he might make use of, is all darkness to me; yet so it was, he one way or other, play'd his Part so well, that, in a few Days after, we received an Order, from the Vice-Chamberlain, positively commanding us, to pay *Dogget* his whole Share, notwithstanding, we had complain'd before of his having withdrawn himself from acting on the Stage, and from the Management of it. This I thought was a dainty Distinction, indeed! that *Dogget's* Defiance of the Commands in favour of *Booth*, should be rewarded with so ample a *Sine cure*, and that we, for our Obedience, should be condemn'd to dig in the Mine, to pay it him! This bitter Pill, I confess, was more than I could down with, and therefore

soon determin'd, at all Events, never to take it. But, as I had a Man in power to deal with, it was not my Business to speak *out* to him, or to set forth our Treatment, in its proper Colours. My only Doubt was, Whether I could bring *Wilks* into the same Sentiments (for he never car'd to litigate any thing, that did not affect his Figure upon the Stage.) But I had the good Fortune to lay our Condition, in so precarious and disagreeable a Light to him, if we submitted to this Order, that he sh'd, before I could get thro' half the Consequences of it; and I began now to find it more difficult, to keep him within Bounds, than I had before to alarm him. I then propos'd to him this Expedient: That we should draw up a Remonstrance neither seeming to refuse, or comply with this Order; but to start such Objections, and perplexing Difficulties, that should make the whole impracticable: That under such Distractions, as this would raise in our Affairs, we could not be answerable to keep open our Doors, which consequently would destroy the Fruit of the Favour lately granted to *Booth*, as well as of this intended to *Dogget* himself. To this Remonstrance we receiv'd an Answer in Writing, which varied something, in the Measures, to accommodate Matters with *Dogget*. This was all I desired, when I found the Style of *Sieges* was alter'd, when this formidable Power began to *parley* with us, we knew there could not be much to be fear'd, from it. For I would have remonstrated, 'till I had died, rather than have yielded to the roughest, or smoothest Persuasion, that could intimidate, or deceive us. By this Conduct, we made the Affair, at last, too troublesome for the Ease of a Courtier to go thro' with. For when it was Consider'd that the principal Point, the Admission of *Booth* was got over, *Dogget* was fairly left to the Law, for Relief.

Upon this Disappointment, *Dogget* accordingly preferred a Bill in *Chancery* against us. *Wilks*, who hated all Business, but that of entertaining the Publick, left the Conduct of our Cause to me; in which we had, at our first setting out, this Advantage of

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 281

of *Dogget*, that we had Three Pockets to support our Expence, where he had but One. My first Direction to our Solicitor was, to use all possible Delay, that the Law would admit of; a Direction that Lawyers seldom neglect; by this means we hung up our Plaintiff about two Years, in *Chancery*, 'till we were at full Leisure to come to a Hearing before the Lord-Chancellor *Cooper*; which did not happen 'till after the Accession of his late Majesty. The Issue of it was this. *Dogget* had about fourteen Days allow'd him to make his Election, whether he would return to act, as usual: But he declaring by his Counsel, That he rather chose to quit the Stage, he was decreed Six Hundred Pounds for his Share, in our Property, with 15 per Cent. Interest, from the Date of the last License: Upon the Receipt of which, both Parties were to sign General-Releases, and severally to pay their own Costs. By this Decree, *Dogget*, when his Lawyer's Bill was paid, scarce got one Year's Purchase, of what we had offered him without Law, which (as he survived but seven Years after it) would have been an Annuity of Five Hundred Pounds, and a *Sine cura* for Life.

Tho' there are many Persons living, who know every Article of these Facts, to be true: Yet it will be found, that the strongest of them, was not the strongest Occasion of *Dogget's* quitting the Stage. If therefore the Reader should not have Curiosity enough to know how the Publick came, to be depriv'd of so valuable an Actor, let him consider, that he is not oblig'd to go through the rest of this Chapter, which I fairly tell him before-hand, will only be fill'd up with a few idle Anecdotes, leading to that Discovery.

After our Law-suit was ended, *Dogget*, for some few Years, could scarce bear the Sight of *Wilks*, or myself; tho' (as shall be shewn) for different Reasons: Yet it was his Misfortune to meet with us almost every Day. *Button's* Coffee House, so celebrated in the *Tailors*, for the Good-Company that came there, was at this Time, in its highest Request: *Addison*, *Steele*,



282 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

*Pope*, and several other Gentlemen of different Merit, then made it their constant *Rendezvous*. Nor could *Dogget* decline the agreeable Conversation there, tho' he was daily sure to find *Wilks*, or my self, in the same Place to four his Share of it: For as *Wilks*, and he were differently proud; the one rejoycing in a captious, over-bearing, valiant Pride; and the other, in a stiff, sullen, Purse-pride, it may be easily conceiv'd, when two such Tempers met, how agreeable the Sight of one was to the other. And as *Dogget* knew, I had been the chief Conductor of our Defence, against his Law-suit, which had hurt him more for the Loss he had sustain'd, in his Reputation of understanding Business, which he valued himself upon, than his Disappointment had, of getting so little by it; it was no wonder if I was entirely out of his good Graces, which I confess, I was inclin'd, upon any reasonable Terms, to have recover'd; he being of all my Theatrical Brethren, the Man I had most delighted in: For when he was not in a Fit of Wisdom, or not over-concern'd about his Interest, he had a great deal of entertaining Humour: I therefore, notwithstanding his Reserve, always left the Door open to our former Intimacy, if he were inclin'd to come into it. I never fail'd to give him my Hat, and *Your Servant*, where-ever I met him; neither of which he would ever return, for above a Year after; but I still persisted, in my usual Salutation, without observing, whether it was civilly receiv'd, or not. This ridiculous Silence between two Comedians, that had so lately liv'd in a constant Course of Raillery, with one another, was often smil'd at, by our Acquaintance, who frequented the same Coffee-house: And one of them carried his Jest upon it so far, that when I was at some Distance from Town, he wrote me a formal Account, that *Dogget* was actually dead. After the first Surprize, his Letter gave me, was over, I began to consider, that this coming from a droll Friend to both of us, might possibly be written, to extract some Merriment out of my real Belief of it: In this, I was not unwilling to gratify him,

him, and return'd an Answer, as if I had taken the Truth of his News for granted ; and was not a little pleas'd, that I had so fair an Opportunity of speaking my Mind freely of *Dogget*, which I did, in some Favour of his Character ; I excus'd his Faults, and was just to his Merit. His Law-suit with us, I only imputed to his having naturally deceiv'd himself in the Justice of his Cause. What I most complain'd of was, his irreconcilable Disaffection to me upon it, whom he could not reasonably blame, for standing in my own Defence ; that not to endure me, after it, was a Reflexion upon his Sense, when all our Acquaintance had been Witnesses of our former Intimacy ; which my Behaviour in his Life-time had plainly shewn him, I had a mind to renew. But since he was now gone (however great a Churl he was to me) I was sorry my Correspondent had lost him.

This Part of my Letter, I was sure, if *Dogget's* Eyes were still open, would be shewn to him ; if not, I had only writ it to no Purpose. But about a Month after, when I came to Town, I had some little Reason to imagine it had the Effect I wish'd from it : For one Day sitting over-against him, at the same Coffee-house, where we often mixt at the same Table, tho' we never exchang'd a single Syllable, he graciously extended his Hand for a Pinch of my Snuff : As this seem'd from him a sort of breaking the Ice of his Temper, I took Courage upon it, to break Silence on my Side, and ask'd him how he lik'd it ? To which, with a slow Hesitation, naturally assist'd by the Action of his taking the Snuff, he reply'd—*Umb! the best—Umb!—I have tasted a great While!*—If the Reader, who may possibly think all this extremely trifling will consider, that Trifles sometimes shew Characters in as strong a Light, as Facts of more serious Importance, I am in hopes he may allow, that my Matter less needs an Excuse, than the Excuse itself does ; if not, I must stand condemn'd at the end of my Story.—But let me go on.

After

After a few Days of these coy, Lady-like Compliances, on his Side, we grew into a more conversable Temper : At last, I took a proper Occasion, and desired he would be so frank with me, as to let me know, what was his real Dislike or Motive, that made him throw up so good an Income, as his Share with us annually brought him in ? For tho' by our Admission of *Booth*, it might not probably amount to so much by a Hundred, or two a Year, as formerly ; yet the Remainder was too considerable, to be quarell'd with, and was likely to continue more than the best Actors before us, had ever got, by the Stage. And farther to encourage him to be open, I told him, If I had done any thing that had particularly disoblig'd him, I was ready, if he could put me in the way, to make him any amends in my Power ; If not, I desired he would be so just to himself, as to let me know the real Truth, without Reserve : But Reserve he could not, from his natural Temper, easily shake off. All he said came from him, by half Sentences, and *Innuendos*—as No, he had not taken any Thing particularly ill—for his Part, he was very easy as he was ; but where others were to dispose of his Property as they pleased—if you had stood it out, as I did, *Booth* might have paid a better Price for it.—You were too much afraid of the Court—but that's all over—There were other Things in the Play-house.—No Man of Spirit.—In short to be always pester'd, and provok'd by a trifling Wasp—a—vain—shallow !—A Man would sooner beg his Bread, than bear it.—(Here it was easy to understand him : I therefore ask'd him, what he had to bear, that I had not my Share of ?) No ! it was not the same thing he said.—You can play with a Bear, or let him alone, and do what he would ; but I could not let him lay his Paws upon me, without being hurt ; you did not feel him, as I did.—And for a Man to be cutting of Throats, upon every Trifle, at my Time of Day !—If I had been as covetous, as he thought me, may be I might have born it, as well as you—but I would not be a Lord of the Treasury, if such a Temper, as *Wilks*, were to be at the Head of it.—

Here,

Here, then, the whole Secret was out. The rest of our Conversation was but explaining upon it. In a Word, the painful Behaviour of *Wilks* had hurt him so sorely, that the Affair of *Booth* was look'd upon, as much a Relief, as a Grievance, in giving him so plausible a Pretence to get rid of us all, with a better Grace.

*Booth* too, in a little time, had his Share of the same Uneasiness, and often complain'd of it to me: Yet as we neither of us could, then, afford to pay *Dagget's* Price, for our Remedy; all we could do, was to avoid every Occasion, in our Power, of inflaming the Distemper: So that we both agreed, tho' *Wilks's* Nature was not to be chang'd, it was a less Evil to live with him, than without him.

Tho' I had often suspected, from what I had felt myself, that the Temper of *Wilks* was *Dagget's* real Quarrel, to the Stage: yet I could never thoroughly believe it, 'till I had it from his own Mouth. And I, then, thought the Concern he had shewn at it was a good deal inconsistent with that Understanding, which was generally allow'd him. When I give my Reasons for it, perhaps the Reader will not have a better Opinion of my own: Be that, as it may, I cannot help wondering, that he, who was so much more capable of Reflexion, than *Wilks*, should sacrifice so valuable an Income, to his Impatience of another's natural Frailty! And tho' my Stoical way of thinking may be no Rule, for a wiser Man's Opinion; yet if it should happen to be right, the Reader may make his Use of it. Why then should we not always consider, that the Rashness of Abuse is but the false Reason of a weak Man? and that offensive Terms are only us'd, to supply the want of Strength in Argument? Which, as to the common Practice of the sober World, we do not find, every Man, in Business, is oblig'd to resent, with a military Sense of Honour: Or if he should, would not the Conclusion amount to this? Because another wants Sense, and Manners, I am oblig'd to be a Madman? For such every Man is, more, or less, while the Passion of Anger is in Possession

session of him. And what less can we call that proud Man, who would put another out of the World; only for putting him out of Humour? If Accounts of the Tongue were always to be made up with the Sword, all the wise Men in the World might be brought in Debtors, to Blockheads. And when Honour pretends, to be Witness, Judge, and Executioner, in its own Cause, if Honour were a Man, would it be an Untruth, to say Honour is a very impudent Fellow? But in *Dogget's* Case, it may be ask'd, How was he to behave himself? Were passionate Insults, to be born, for Years together? To these Questions, I can only answer with two, or three more, Was he to punish himself, because another was in the wrong? How many sensible Husbands endure the teizing Tongue of a froward Wife, only because she is the weaker Vessel? And why should not a weak Man have the same Indulgence? Daily Experience will tell us, that the fretful Temper of a Friend, like the Personal Beauty of a fine Lady, by Use, and Cohabitation, may be brought down, to give us neither Pain, nor Pleasure. Such, at least, and no more, was the Distress I found myself in, upon the same Provocations, which I generally return'd with humming an Air to myself; or if the Storm grew very high, it might, perhaps, sometimes ruffle me enough, to sing a little out of Tune. Thus too (if I had any ill Nature to gratify) I often saw the unruly Passion of the Aggressor's Mind punish itself, by a restless Disorder of the Body.

What inclines me, therefore, to think the Conduct of *Dogget* was as rash, as the Provocations he complain'd of is, that in some time after he had left us, he plainly discover'd he had repented it. His Acquaintance observ'd to us, that he sent many a long Look after his Share, in the still prosperous State of the Stage: But, as his Heart was too high to declare (what he saw too) his shy Inclination to return, he made us no direct Overtures. Nor, indeed, did we care (tho' he was a golden Actor) to pay too dear for him: For as most of his Parts had been pretty well



*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 287

well supply'd, he could not, now, be of his former Value, to us. However to shew the Town, at least, that he had not forsworn the Stage, he, one Day, condescended to play for the Benefit of Mrs. Porter, in the *Wanton Wife*, at which he knew his late Majesty was to be present. Now (tho' I speak it not of my own Knowledge) yet it was not likely Mrs. Porter would have ask'd that Favour of him, without some previous Hint, that it would be granted. His coming among us, for that Day only, had a strong appearance of his laying it in our way to make him Proposals, or that he hoped the Court, or Town, might intimate to us, their Desire of seeing him oftener: But as he acted only to do a particular Favour, the Managers ow'd him no Compliment for it, beyond common Civilities. And, as that might not be all he propos'd by it, his farther Views (if he had any) came to nothing. For after this Attempt, he never return'd to the Stage.

To speak of him, as an Actor: He was the most an Original, and the strictest Observer of Nature, of all his Contemporaries. He borrow'd from none of them: His Manner was his own: He was a Pattern to others, whose greatest Merit was, that they had sometimes tolerably imitated him. In dressing a Character to the greatest Exactness, he was remarkably skilful; the least Article of whatever Habit he wore, seem'd in some degree to speak and mark the different Humour he presented; a necessary Care in a Comedian, in which many have been too remiss, or ignorant. He could be extremely ridiculous, without stepping into the least Impropriety, to make him so. His greatest Success was in Characters of lower Life, which he improv'd, from the Delight he took, in his Observations of that Kind, in the real World. In Songs, and particular Dances too, of Humour, he had no Competitor. *Congreve* was a great Admirer of him, and found his Account, in the Characters he expressly wrote for him. In those of *Fondlewife*, in his *Old Batchelor*; and *Ben*, in *Love for Love*, no Author, and Actor could be more oblig'd to their mutual masterly

288 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

terly Performances. He was very acceptable to several Persons of high Rank, and Taste: 'Tho' he seldom car'd to be the Comedian, but among his more intimate Acquaintance.

And now let me ask the World a Question. When Men have any valuable Qualities, why are the generality of our modern Wits so fond of exposing their Failings only, which the wisest of Mankind will never be wholly free from? Is it of more use to the Publick, to know their Errors, than their Perfections? Why is the Account of Life to be so unequally stated? 'Tho' a Man may be sometimes Debtor to Sense, or Morality, is it not doing him Wrong, not to let the World see, at the same time, how far he may be Creditor to both? Are Defects and Disproportions, to be the only labour'd Features in a Portrait? But perhaps such Authors may know how to please the World better than I do, and may naturally suppose, that what is delightful to themselves, may not be disagreeable to others. For my own part, I confess myself a little touch'd in Conscience, at what I have, just now, observ'd to the disadvantage of my other Brother-Manager.

If therefore, in discovering the true Cause of the Publick's losing so valuable an Actor, as *Dogget*, I have been oblig'd to shew the Temper of *Wilks*, in its natural Complexion, ought I not, in amends, and balance of his Imperfections, to say at the same time of him, That if he was not the most correct, or judicious, yet (as *Hamlet* says of the King his Father) *Take him for All, in All, &c.* he was certainly the most diligent, most laborious, and most useful Actor, that I have seen upon the Stage, in Fifty Years.

*Sir Richard Steele succeeds Collier, in the Theatre-Royal. Lincolns-Inn-Fields House rebuilt. The Patent restored. Eight Actors at once desert, from the King's Company. Why. A new Patent obtain'd by Sir Richard Steele, and assign'd in Shares, to the managing Actors of Drury-Lane. Of modern Pantomimes. The Rise of them. Vanity invincible, and asham'd. The Non-juror acted. The Author, not forgiven; and rewarded for it.*

UPON the Death of the Queen, Plays (as they always had been on the like Occasions) were silenc'd for six Weeks. But this happening on the first of *August*, in the long Vacation of the Theatre, the Observance of that Ceremony, which at another Juncture would have fallen like wet Weather upon their Harvest, did them now no particular Damage. Their License however being of course to be renew'd, that Vacation gave the Managers Time to cast about, for the better Alteration of it: And since they knew the Pension of seven hundred a Year, which had been levied upon them for *Collier*, must still be paid to somebody, they imagin'd the Merit of a *Whig* might now have as good a Chance for getting into it, as that of a *Tory* had for being continued in it? Having no Obligations, therefore, to *Collier*, who had made the last Penny of them; they applied themselves to *Sir Richard Steele*, who had distinguish'd himself, by his Zeal for the House of *Hanover*, and had been expell'd the House of Commons, for carrying it (as was judg'd at a certain Crisis) into a Reproach of the Government. This we knew was his Pretension to that Favour, in which he now stood, at Court: We knew too, the Obligations the Stage had to his Writings; there being

being scarce a Comedian of Merit, in our whole Company, whom his *Tatlers* had not made better, by his publick Recommendation of them. And many Days had our House been particularly fill'd, by the Influence, and Credit of his Pen. Obligations of this kind from a Gentleman, with whom they all had the Pleasure of a Personal Intimacy, the Managers thought could not be more justly return'd, than by shewing him some warm Instance of their Desire, to have him at the Head of them. We therefore beg'd him to use his Interest, for the Renewal of our License, and that he would do us the Honour of getting our Names to stand with his, in the same Commission. This, we told him, would put it still farther in his Power of supporting the Stage, in that Reputation, to which his Lucubrations had already so much contributed; and that therefore we thought no Man had better Pretences to partake of its Success.

Though it may be no Addition to the favourable Part of this Gentleman's Character, to say with what Pleasure he receiv'd this Mark of our Inclination to him, yet my Vanlty longs to tell you, that it surpris'd him into an Acknowledgment, that People, who are shy of Obligations, are cautious of confessing. His Spirits took such a lively Turn upon it, that had we been all his own Sons, no unexpected Act of filial Duty could have more endear'd us to him.

It must be observ'd, then, that as *Collier* had no Share, in any Part of our Property, no Difficulties, from that Quarter, could obstruct this Proposal. And the usual Time of our beginning to act for the Winter-Season, now drawing near, we press'd him not to lose any Time in his Solicitation of this new License. Accordingly Sir *Richard* apply'd himself to the Duke of *Marlborough*, the Hero of his Heart, who, upon the first mention of it, obtain'd it of his Majesty, for Sir *Richard*, and the former Managers, who were Actors. *Collier* we heard no more of.

The Court, and Town, being crowded very early, in the Winter-Season, upon the critical Turn of Affairs,

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 291

fairs, so much expected from the *Hanover* Succession, the Theatre had its particular Share of that general Blessing, by a more than ordinary Concourse of Spectators.

About this Time the Patentee, having very near finish'd his House, in *Lincolns-Inn-Fields*, began to think of forming a new Company; and in the mean Time, found it necessary to apply for Leave to employ them. By the weak Defence he had always made against the several Attacks upon his Interest, and former Government of the Theatre, it might be a Question, if his House had been ready, in the Queen's Time, whether he would, then, have had the Spirit to ask, or Interest enough to obtain Leave to use it: But in the following Reign, as it did not appear he had done any thing to forfeit the Right of his Patent, he prevail'd with Mr. *Craggs* the younger, (afterwards Secretary of State) to lay his Case before the King, which he did in so effectual a manner, that (as Mr. *Craggs* himself told me) his Majesty was pleas'd to say upon it, "That he remember'd, when he had been in *England* before, in King *Charles* his Time, there had been two Theatres in *London*; and as the Patent seem'd to be a lawful Grant, he saw no Reason, why two Play-houses might not be continued."

The Suspension of the Patent being thus taken off, the younger Multitude seem'd to call aloud for two Play-houses! Many desired another, from the common Notion, that *Two* would always create Emulation, in the Actors (an Opinion, which I have consider'd in a former Chapter.) Others too, were as eager for them, from the natural Ill-will that follows the Fortunate, or Prosperous, in any Undertaking. Of this low Malevolence we had, now and then, had remarkable Instances; we had been forced to dismiss an Audience of a hundred and fifty Pounds, from a Disturbance spirited up, by obscure People, who never gave any better Reason for it, than that it was their Fancy to support the idle Complaint of one rival Actress against another, in their several Pretensions to

C c c

the



the chief Part in a new Tragedy. But as this Tumult seem'd only to be the Wantonness of *English* Liberty, I shall not presume to lay any farther Censure upon it.

Now, notwithstanding this publick Desire of re-establishing two Houses; and though I have allow'd the former Actors greatly our Superiors; and the Managers I am speaking of, not to have been without their private Errors. Yet, under all these Disadvantages, it is certain, the Stage, for twenty Years before this time, had never been in so flourishing a Condition: And it was as evident to all sensible Spectators, that this Prosperity could be only owing to that better Order, and closer Industry, now daily observ'd; and which had formerly been neglected by our Predecessors. But that I may not impose upon the Reader a Merit, which was not generally allow'd us, I ought honestly to let him know, that about this Time, the publick Papers, particularly *Miss's Journal*, took upon them very often to censure our Management, with the same Freedom, and Severity, as if we had been so many Ministers of State: But so it happen'd, that these unfortunate Reformers of the World, these self-appointed *Censors* hardly ever hit upon what was really wrong, in us; but taking up Facts upon Trust, or Hear-say, piled up many a pompous Paragraph, that they had ingeniously conceiv'd was sufficient to demolish our Administration, or at least, to make us very uneasy in it; which, indeed, had so far its Effect, that my equally-injur'd Brethren *Wilks*, and *Booth*, often complain'd to me of these disagreeable Aspersions, and propos'd, that some publick Answer might be made to them, which I always oppos'd, by perhaps, too secure a Contempt of what such Writers could do to hurt us; and my Reason for it was, that I knew but of one way to silence Authors of that Stamp; which was, to grow insignificant, and good for nothing, and then we should hear no more of them: But while we continued in the Prosperity of pleasing others, and were not conscious of having deserv'd what they said of us, why should we gratify the little Spleen of our Enemies,

mies, by wincing at it, or give them fresh Opportunities to dine upon any Reply they might make to our publickly taking Notice of them? And though Silence might, in some Cases, be a sign of Guilt, or Error confess'd, our Accusers were so low in their Credit and Sense, that the Content we gave the Publick, almost every Day, from the Stage, ought to be our only Answer to them.

However (as I have observ'd) we made many Blots, which these unskilful Gamesters never hit: But the Fidelity of an Historian, cannot be excus'd the Omission of any Truth, which might make for the other side of the Question. I shall therefore confess a Fact, which, if a happy Accident had not interven'd had brought our Affairs, into a very tottering Condition. This too, is that Fact, which in a former Chapter, I promis'd to set forth as a Sea-Mark of Danger, to future Managers, in their Theatrical Course of Government.

When the new-built Theatre, in *Lincoln's-Inn-Fields* was ready to be open'd, seven or eight Actors, in one Day, deserted from us, to the Service of the Enemy, which oblig'd us to postpone many of our best Plays for want of some inferior Part in them, which these Deserters had been us'd to fill: But the Indulgence of the Royal Family, who then frequently honour'd us, by their Presence, was pleas'd to accept of whatever could be hastily got ready for their Entertainment. And though this critical good Fortune, prevented, in some Measure, our Audiences falling so low, as otherwise they might have done, yet it was not sufficient to keep us in our former Prosperity: For that Year, our Profits amounted not to above a third Part of our usual Dividends; though in the following Year we intirely recover'd them. The Chief of these Deserters were *Keene, Bullock, Park, Leigh*, Son of the famous *Toney Leigh*, and others of less note. 'Tis true none of them had more than a negative Merit, in being only able to do us more Harm by their leaving us, without Notice, than they could do us Good, by their remaining with us: For though

the best of them could not support a Play, the worst of them, by their Absence, could maim it; as the Loss of the least Pin, in a Watch, may obstruct its Motion. But to come to the true Cause of their Desertion; after my having discover'd the (long unknown) Occasion that drove *Dogget* from the Stage, before his settled inclination to leave it; it will be less incredible, that these Actors, upon the first Opportunity to relieve themselves, should all, in one Day, have left us from the same Cause of Uneasiness. For in a little time after, upon not finding their Expectations answer'd, in *Lincoln-Inn-Fields*, some of them, who seem'd to answer for the rest, told me, the greatest Grievance they had, in our Company, was the shocking Temper of *Wilks*, who, upon every, almost no Occasion, let loose the unlimited Language of Passion upon them, in such a manner as their Patience was not longer able to support. This, indeed, was what we could not justify! This was a Secret, that might have made a wholesome Paragraph, in a critical News-Paper! But as it was our good Fortune, that it came not to the Ears of our Enemies, the Town was not entertain'd, with their publick Remarks upon it.

After this new Theatre had enjoy'd that short Run of Favour, which is apt to follow Novelty; their Audiences began to flag; But whatever good Opinion we had of our own Merit, we had not so good a one of the Multitude, as to depend too much upon the Delicacy of their Taste: We knew too, that this Company being so much nearer to the City, than we were, would intercept many an honest Customer, that might not know a good Market, from a bad one; and that the thinnest of their Audiences, must be always taking something from the Measure of our Profits. All these Disadvantages, with many others, we were forced to lay before Sir *Richard Steel*, and farther to remonstrate to him, that as he now stood in *Collier's Place*, his Pension of 700 *l* was liable to the same Conditions, that *Collier* had received it upon; which were, that it should be only payable during

our

our being the only Company permitted to act, but in case another should be set up against us, that then this Pension was to be liquidated into an equal Share with us; and which we now hoped he would be contented with. While we were offering to proceed, Sir *Richard* stopt us short, by assuring us, that as he came among us, by our own Invitation, he should always think himself oblig'd, to come into any Measures, for our Ease, and Service: That to be a Burthen to our Industry, would be more disagreeable to him, than it could be to us; and as he had always taken a Delight, in his Endeavours for our Prosperity, he should be still ready on our own Terms, to continue them. Every one who knew Sir *Richard Steel*, in his Prosperity (before the Effects of his Good-nature had brought him to Distresses) knew that this was his manner of dealing with his Friends, in Business: Another Instance of the same nature will immediately fall in my way.

When we propos'd to put this Agreement, into Writing, he desired us not to hurry ourselves; for that he was advis'd, upon the late Desertion of our Actors, to get our License (which only subsisted during Pleasure) enlarg'd into a more ample, and durable Authority, and which he said he had reason to think would be more easily obtain'd, if we were willing, that a Patent for the same purpose might be granted to Him only, for his Life, and three Years after, which he would then assign over to us. This was a prospect beyond our Hopes; and what we had long wish'd for; for tho' I cannot say, we had ever Reason to grieve at the personal Severities, or Behaviour, of any one Lord-Chamberlain, in my Time, yet the several Officers, under them, who had not the Hearts of Noblemen, often treated us (to use *Shakespear's* Expression) with all the *Insolence of Office*, that narrow Minds are apt to be elated with; but a Patent, we knew, would free us from so abject a State of Dependency. Accordingly, we desired Sir *Richard* to lose no time; he was immediately promis'd it: In the Interim, we founded the Inclination of the Actors remaining  
with

296 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

with us; who had all Sense enough to know, that the Credit, and Reputation we stood in, with the Town, could not but be a better Security for their Salaries, than the promise of any other Stage, put into Bonds, could make good to them. In a few Days after, Sir *Richard* told us, that his Majesty being apprised that others had a joint Power with him, in the License, it was expected we should, under our Hands, signify, that his Petition for a Patent was prefer'd, by the Consent of us all. Such an Acknowledgment was immediately sign'd, and the Patent thereupon pass'd the Great Seal; for which I remember the Lord-Chancellor *Cooper*, in Compliment to Sir *Richard*, would receive no Fee.

We receiv'd the Patent *January 19, 1718*, and Sir *Richard*, being oblig'd the next Morning to set out for *Burrowbridge* in *Yorkshire*, where he was soon after elected Member for the new Parliament) we were forc'd that very Night, to draw up in a hurry (till our Counsel might more advisably perfect it) his Assignment to us of equal Shares, in the Patent, with farther Conditions of Partnership: But here I ought to take shame to myself, and at the same time to give this second Instance of the Equity, and Honour of Sir *Richard*: For this Assignment (which I had myself the hasty Penning of) was so worded, that it gave Sir *Richard* as equal a Title to our Property, as it had given us to his Authority in the Patent: But Sir *Richard*, notwithstanding, when he return'd to Town, took no Advantage of the Mistake, and consented in our second Agreement, to pay us Twelve Hundred Pounds, to be equally intitled to our Property, which at his Death we were oblig'd to repay (as we afterwards did) to his Executors; and which, in case any of us had died before him, the Survivors were equally oblig'd to have paid to the Executors of such deceased Person, upon the same Account. But Sir *Richard*'s Moderation with us, was rewarded with the Reverse of *Collier*'s Stiffness: *Collier* by insisting on his Pension, lost Three Hundred Pounds a Year; and Sir *Richard*, by his accepting a Share in

Lieu



Lieu of it, was one Year with another, as much a Gainer.

The Grant of this Patent having assur'd us of a competent Term, to be relied on, we were now emboldened, to lay out larger Sums, in the Decorations of our Plays: Upon the Revival of *Dryden's All for Love*, the Habits of that Tragedy amounted to an Expence of near Six Hundred Pounds; a Sum unheard of, for many Years before, on the like Occasions. But we thought such extraordinary Marks of our Acknowledgment were due to the Favours, which the Publick were now, again pouring in upon us. About this Time we were so much in Fashion, and follow'd, that our Enemies (who they were, it would not be fair to guess, for we never knew them) made their push of a good round Lye upon us, to terrify those Auditors, from our Support, whom they could not mislead by their private Arts, or publick Investives. A current Report, that the Walls, and Roof of our House, were liable to fall, had got such ground in the Town, that on a sudden, we found our Audiences unusually decreas'd by it: *Wilks* was immediately for denouncing War, and Vengeance on the Author of this Falshood, and for offering a Reward to whoever could discover him. But it was thought more necessary first to disprove the Falshood, and then to pay what Compliments might be thought adviseable to the Author. Accordingly an Order from the King was obtain'd, to have our Tenement survey'd, by Sir *Thomas Hewit*, then the proper Officer; whose Report of its being in a safe and sound Condition, and sign'd by him, was publish'd in every News Paper. This had so immediate an Effect, that our Spectators, whose Apprehensions had lately kept them absent, now made up our Losses, by returning to us, with a fresh Inclination, and in greater Numbers.

When it was first publickly known, that the New Theatre would be open'd against us; I cannot help going a little back to remember the Concern that my Brother-Managers express'd at what might be the Consequences

## 298 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

sequences of it. They imagin'd, that now, all those who wish'd Ill to us, and particularly a great Party, who had been disobligh'd, by our shutting them out from behind our Scenes, even to the Refusal of their Money, would now exert themselves, in any partial, or extravagant Measures, that might either hurt us, or support our Competitors: These too were some of those farther Reasons, which had discourag'd them, from running the hazard of continuing to Sir *Richard Steele* the same Pension which had been paid to *Collier*. Upon all which, I observed to them, that for my own Part, I had not the same Apprehensions; but that I foresaw as many good, as bad Consequences from two Houses: That tho' the Novelty might possibly at first abate a little of our Profits; yet if we slacken'd not our Industry, that Loss would be amply balanc'd, by an equal Increase of our Ease, and Quiet: That those turbulent Spirits which were always molesting us, would now have other Employment: That the question'd Merit of our Acting would now stand in a clearer Light, when others were faintly compared to us; That tho' Faults might be found, with the best Actors, that ever were, yet the egregious Defects, that would appear in others, would now be the effectual means to make our Superiority shine, if we had any Pretence to it: And that what some People hoped might ruin us, would in the end reduce them to give up the Dispute, and reconcile them to those who could best entertain them.

In every Article of this Opinion, they afterwards found I had not been deceiv'd; and the Truth of it may be so well remember'd by many living Spectators, that it would be too frivolous and needless to boast, to give it any farther Observation.

But, in what I have said, I would not be understood to be an Advocate, for two Play-houses: For we shall soon find that two Sets of Actors, tolerated in the same Place, have constantly ended in the Corruption of the Theatre; of which the auxiliary Entertainments, that have so barbarously supply'd the Defects of  
weak

weak Action, have for some Years past, been a flagrant Instance; it may not therefore, be here improper to shew how our childish Pantomimes first came to take so gross a possession of the Stage.

I have upon several Occasions already observ'd, that when one Company is too hard for another, the lower, in Reputation, has always been forc'd to exhibit some new-fangled Foppery, to draw the Multitude after them: Of these Expedients, Singing and Dancing had formerly been the most effectual; but, at the Time I am speaking of, our *English* Musick had been so discountenanc'd, since the Taste of *Italian* Operas prevail'd, that it was to no purpose, to pretend to it. Dancing therefore was, now, the only Weight in the opposite Scale, and as the New Theatre sometimes found their Account in it, it could not be safe for us, wholly to neglect it. To give even Dancing therefore some Improvement, and to make it something more than Motion without Meaning, the Fable of *Mars* and *Venus*, was form'd into a connected presentation of Dances in Character, wherein the Passions were so happily express'd, and the whole Story so intelligibly told, by a mute Narration of Gesture only, that even thinking Spectators allow'd it both a pleasing, and a rational Entertainment; tho', at the same time, from our Distrust of its Reception, we durst not venture to decorate it, with any extraordinary Expence of Scenes, or Habits; but upon the Success of this Attempt, it was rightly concluded, that if a visible Expence in both, were aded to something of the same Nature, it could not fail of drawing the Town proportionably after it. From this original Hint then (but every way unequal to it) sprung forth that Succession of monstrous Medlies, that have so long infested the Stage, and which arose upon one another alternately, at both Houses outvying, in Expence, like contending Bribes on both sides at an Election, to secure a Majority of the Multitude. But so it is, Truth may complain, and Merit murmur with what Justice it may, the Few will never be a Match for the Many, unless

unless Authority should think fit to interpose, and put down these Poetical Drams, these Gin-shops of the Stage, that intoxicate its Auditors, and dishonour their Understanding, with a Levity for which I want a Name.

If I am ask'd (after my condemning these Fooleries myself) how I came to assent, or continue my Share of Expence to them? I have no better Excuse for my Error, than confessing it. I did it against my Conscience! and had not Virtue enough to starve, by opposing a Multitude, that would have been too hard for me. Now let me ask an odd Question: Had *Harry the Fourth* of France a better Excuse, for changing his Religion? I was still in my Heart, as much as he could be, on the side of Truth and Sense, but with this difference, that I had their leave to quit them, when they could not support me: For what Equivalent could I have found for my falling a Martyr to them? How far the Heroe, or the Comedian, was in the wrong, let the Clergy, and the Criticks decide. Necessity will be as good a Plea for the one, as the other. But let the Question go which way it will, *Harry IV.* has been always allow'd a Great Man: And what I want of his Grandeur, you see by the Inference. Nature has amply supply'd to me, in Vanity; a Pleasure which neither the pertness of Wit, or the gravity of Wisdom, will ever persuade me to part with. And why is there not as much Honesty in owning, as in concealing it? For though to hide it may be Wisdom, to be without it is impossible; and where is the Merit of keeping a Secret, which every Body is let into? To say we have no Vanity then, is shewing a great deal of it; as to say we *have* a great deal, cannot be shewing so much, And tho', there may be Art in a Man's accusing himself, even then it will be more pardonable, than Self-commendation. Do we not find, that even good Actions have their Share of it? that it is as inseparable, from our Being, as our Nakedness? And tho' it may be equally decent to cover it, yet the wisest Man can no more be without it, than the weakest can believe he was born,

in

in his Cloaths. If then what we say of ourselves be true, and not prejudicial to others, to be called vain upon it, is no more a Reproach, than to be called a brown, or a fair Man. Vanity is of all Complexions; 'tis the growth of every Clime, and Capacity; Authors of all Ages have had a Tincture of it; and yet you read *Horace*, *Montaigne*, and *Sir William Temple*, with Pleasure. Nor am I sure, if it were curable by Precept, that Mankind would be mended by it! Could Vanity be eradicated, from our Nature, I am afraid, that the Reward of most human Virtues, would not be found, in this World! And happy is he, who has no greater Sin to answer for, in the next!

But what is all this to the Theatrical Follies I was talking of? Perhaps not a great deal; but it is to my Purpose; for though I am an Historian, I do not write to the Wise, and Learned only; I hope to have Readers of no more Judgment, than some of my *quondam* Auditors; and I am afraid they will be as hardly contented, with dry Matters of Fact, as with a plain Play, without Entertainments: This Rhapsody, therefore, has been thrown in, as a Dance between the Acts, to make up for the Dullness of what would have been by itself only proper. But I now come to my Story again.

Notwithstanding, then, this our Compliance with the vulgar Taste; we generally made use of these Pantomimes, but as Crutches to our weakest Plays: Nor were we so lost to all Sense of what was valuable, as to dishonour our best Authors, in such bad Company: We had still a due Respect to several select Plays, that were able to be their own Support; and in which we found our constant Account, without painting, and patching them out, like Prostitutes, with these Follies in Fashion: If therefore we were not so strictly chaste, in the other part of our Conduct, let the Error of it stand among the silly Consequences of two Stages. Could the Interest of both Companies have been united, in one only Theatre; I had been one of the Few, that would have us'd my utmost Endeavour



of never admitting to the Stage any Spectacle, that ought not to have been seen there ; the Errors of my own Plays, which I could not see, excepted. And though probably, the Majority of Spectators would not have been so well pleas'd with a Theatre so regulated ; yet Sense, and Reason cannot lose their intrinsic Value, because the giddy, and the ignorant, are blind and deaf, or numerous ; and I cannot help saying, it is a Reproach to a sensible People, to let Folly so publickly govern their Pleasures.

While I am making this grave Declaration of what I *would* have done, had one only Stage been continued ; to obtain an easier Belief of my Sincerity, I ought to put my Reader in mind of what I *did* do, even after two Companies were again establish'd.

About this Time *Jacobitism* had lately exerted itself, by the most unprovoked Rebellion, that our Histories have handed down to us, since the *Norman Conquest* : I therefore thought that to set the Authors, and Principles of that desperate Folly in a fair Light, by allowing the mistaken Consciences of some their best Excuse, and by making the artful Pretenders to Conscience, as ridiculous, as they were ungratefully wicked, was a Subject fit for the honest Satire of Comedy, and what might, if it succeeded, do Honour to the Stage, by shewing the valuable Use of it. And considering what Numbers, at that time, might come to it, as prejudic'd Spectators, it may be allow'd that the Undertaking was not less hazardous, than laudable.

To give Life, therefore, to this Design, I borrow'd the *Tartuffe* of *Moliere*, and turn'd him, into a modern *Nonjuror* : Upon the Hypocrisy of the *French* Character, I ingrafted a stronger Wickedness, that of an *English* Popish Priest, lurking under the Doctrine of our own Church, to raise his Fortune, upon the Ruin of a worthy Gentleman, whom his dissembled Sanctity had seduc'd into the treasonable Cause of a *Roman Catholick* Out-law. How this Design, in the Play, was executed I refer to the Readers of it ; it cannot be mended, by any critical Remarks, I can make,

make, in its favour : Let it speak for itself. All the Reason I had to think it no bad Performance, was, that it was acted eighteen Days running, and that the Party, that were hurt by it (as I have been told) have not been the smallest Number of my back Friends ever since. But happy was it for this Play, that the very Subject was its Protection ; a few Smiles of silent Contempt were the utmost Disgrace, that on the first Day of its Appearance it was thought safe to throw upon it ; as the Satire was chiefly employ'd on the Enemies of the Government, they were not so hardy, as to own themselves such, by any higher Disapprobation, or Resentment. But as it was then probable I might write again, they knew it would not be long before they might with more Security give a Loose to their Spleen, and make up Accounts with me. And to do them Justice, in every Play I afterwards produced, they paid me the Balance, to a Tittle. But to none was I more beholden, than that celebrated Author Mr. *Mist*, whose *Weekly Journal*, for about fifteen Years following, scarce ever fail'd of passing some of his Party Compliments upon me : The State, and the Stage, were his frequent Parallels, and the Minister, and *Minbeer Keiber* the Manager, were as constantly droll'd upon : Now, for my own Part, though I could never persuade my Wit to have an open Account with him (for as he had no Effects of his own, I did not think myself oblig'd to answer his Bills) Notwithstanding, I will be so charitable to his real *Manes*, and to the Ashes of his Paper, as to mention one particular Civility, he paid to my Memory, after he thought he had ingeniously kill'd me. Soon after the *Nonjuror* had receiv'd the Favour of the Town, I read, in one of his Journals, the following short Paragraph, *viz. Yesterday died Mr. Colley Cibber, late Comedian of the Theatre-Royal, notorious for writing the Nonjuror.* The Compliment, in the latter part, I confess, I did not dislike, because it came from so impartial a Judge ; and it really so happen'd, that the former part of it was very near being true ; for I had

that very Day just crawled out, after having been some Weeks laid up by a Fever: However, I saw no use, in being thought to be thoroughly dead, before my Time, and therefore had a mind to see, whether the Town cared to have me alive again: So the Play of the *Orphan* being to be acted that Day, I quietly stole myself into the Part of the *Chaplain*, which I had not been seen in, for many Years before. The Surprise of the Audience at my unexpected Appearance on the very Day, I had been dead in the News, and the Paleness of my Looks, seem'd to make it a Doubt, whether I was not the Ghost, of my real Self departed: But when I spoke, their Wonder eas'd itself by an Applause; which convinc'd me, they were then satisfied, that my Friend *Mist* had told a *Fib* of me. Now, if simply to have shewn myself in broad Life, and about my Business, after he had *notoriously* reported me dead, can be call'd a Reply, it was the only one, which his Paper, while alive, ever drew from me. How far I may be vain, then, in supposing that this Play brought me into the Disfavour of so many Wits, and valiant Auditors, as afterwards appear'd against me, let those who may think it worth their Notice, judge. In the mean time, till I can find a better Excuse for their, sometimes particular, Treatment of me, I cannot easily give up my Suspicion: And if I add a more remarkable Fact, that afterwards confirm'd me in it, perhaps it may incline others to join in my Opinion.

On the first Day of the *Provok'd Husband*, ten Years after the *Nonjuror* had appear'd; a powerful Party, not having the Fear of publick Offence, or private Injury before their Eyes, appear'd most impetuously concern'd for the Demolition of it; in which they so far succeeded, that for some Time I gave it up for lost; and to follow their Blows, in the publick Papers of the next Day, it was attack'd, and triumph'd over, as a dead, and damn'd Piece; a swinging Criticism was made upon it, in general invective Terms, for they disdain'd to trouble the World with Particulars; their Sentence, it seems, was Proof enough of its deserving

ving the Fate it had met with. But this damn'd Play was notwithstanding, acted twenty-eight Nights together, and left off, at a Receipt of upwards of a hundred and forty Pounds, which happen'd to be more, than in fifty Years before, could be then said, of any one Play whatsoever.

Now, if such notable Behaviour could break out upon so successful a Play (which too, upon the Share Sir *John Vanbrugh* had in it, I will venture to call it a good one) what shall we impute it to? Why may not I plainly say, it was not the Play, but Me, who had a Hand in it, they did not like? And for what Reason? if they were not ashamed of it, why did not they publish it? No! the Reason had publish'd itself, I was the Author of the *Nonjuror*! But, perhaps, of all Authors, I ought not to make this sort of Complaint, because I have Reason to think, that that particular Offence has made me more honourable Friends than Enemies; the latter of which I am not unwilling should know (however unequal the Merit may be to the Reward) that Part of the Bread I now eat, was given me, for having writ the *Nonjuror*.

And yet I cannot but lament with many quiet Spectators, the helpless Misfortune, that has so many Years attended the Stage! That no Law has had Force enough to give it absolute Protection! for 'till we can civilize its Auditors, the Authors, that write for it, will seldom have a greater Call to it, than Necessity; and how unlikely is the Imagination of the Needy, to inform, or delight the many, in Affluence? or how often does Necessity make many unhappy Gentlemen turn Authors, in spite of Nature?

What a Blessing, therefore is it! what an enjoy'd Deliverance! after a Wretch has been driven by Fortune, to stand so many wanton Buffets of unmanly Pierceness, to find himself at last, quietly lifted above the Reach of them!

But let not this Reflection fall upon my Auditors, without Distinction; for though Candour, and Benevolence, are silent Virtues, they are as visible, as the most vociferous Ill-nature; and I confess, the Publick has given me more frequent Reason to be thankful, than to complain.

## C H A P. XVI.

*The Author steps out of his Way. Pleads his Theatrical Cause in Chancery. Carries it. Plays acted at Hampton - Court. Theatrical Anecdotes in former Reigns. Ministers, and Managers always censur'd. The Difficulty of supplying the Stage, with good Actors, consider'd. Courtiers, and Comedians govern'd by the same Passions. Examples of both. The Author quits the Stage. Why.*

**H**AVING brought the Government of the Stage through such various Changes, and Revolutions, to this settled State, in which it continued to almost the Time of my leaving it; it cannot be suppos'd, that a Period of so much Quiet, and so long a Train of Success (though happy for those, who enjoy'd it) can afford such Matter of Surprize, or Amusement, as might arise from Times of more Distress, and Disorder. A quiet Time, in History, like a Calm, in a Voyage, leave us but in an indolent Station: To talk of our Affairs, when they were no longer ruffled, by Misfortunes, would be a Picture without Shade, a flat Performance, at best. As I might, therefore, throw all that tedious Time of our Tranquillity, into one Chasm, in my History, and cut my Way short, at once, to my last Exit, from the Stage, I shall at least, fill it up with such matter only, as I have a Mind should be known, how few soever may have Patience to read it: Yet, as I despair not of some Readers, who may be most awake, when they think others have most Occasion to sleep; who may be more pleas'd to find me languid, than lively, or in the Wrong than in the right; why should I scruple (when it is so easy a Matter too) to gratify their particular taste, by venturing



ring upon any Error, that I like, or the Weakness of my Judgment misleads me to commit? I think too, I have a very good Chance for my Success, in this passive Ambition, by shewing my self in a Light, I have not been seen in.

By your Leave then, Gentlemen! let the Scene open, and, at once, discover your Comedian, at the Bar! There you will find him a Defendant, and pleading his own Theatrical Cause in a Court of *Chancery*: But, as I chuse to have a Chance of pleasing others, as well as of indulging you Gentlemen; I must first beg leave, to open my Case to them; after which, my whole Speech upon that Occasion, shall be at your Mercy.

In all the Transactions of Life, there cannot be a more painful Circumstance, than a Dispute at Law, with a Man, with whom we have long liv'd, in an agreeable Amity: But when Sir *Richard Steele*, to get himself out of Difficulties, was oblig'd to throw his Affairs into the Hands of Lawyers, and Trustees, that Consideration, then, could be of no Weight: The Friend, or the Gentleman, had no more to do in the Matter! Thus while Sir *Richard* no longer acted, from himself, it may be no Wonder, if a Flaw was found in our Conduct, for the Law to make Work with. It must be observ'd then, that about two or three Years, before this Suit was commenc'd, upon Sir *Richard's* totally absenting himself, from all Care and Management of the Stage (which by our Articles of Partnership he was equally, and jointly oblig'd with us, to attend) we were reduc'd to let him know, that we could not go on at that Rate; but that if he expected to make the Business a *sine Cure*, we had as much Reason to expect a Consideration for our extraordinary Care of it; and that during his Absence, we therefore intended to charge our selves at a Salary of 1*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.* every acting Day (unless he could shew us Cause to the contrary) for our Management: To which, in his compos'd Manner, he only answer'd; That to be sure, we knew what was fitter to be done than he did; that he  
had

had always taken a Delight, in making us easy, and had no Reason to doubt of our doing him Justice. Now whether, under this easy Stile of Approbation, he conceal'd any Dislike of our Resolution, I cannot say. But, if I may speak my private Opinion, I really believe, from his natural Negligence of his Affairs, he was glad, at any Rate, to be excus'd an Attendance which he was now grown weary of. But whether I am deceiv'd, or right in my Opinion, the Fact was truly this, that he never once, directly, nor indirectly complain'd, or objected to our being paid the above-mention'd daily Sum, in near three Years together; and yet still continued to absent himself from us, and our Affairs. But notwithstanding, he had seen, and done all this with his Eyes open; his Lawyer thought here was still a fair Field, for a Battle in Chancery, in which though his Client might be beaten, he was sure his Bill must be paid for it: Accordingly, to work with us he went. But not to be so long, as the Lawyers were in bringing this Cause to an Issue, I shall at once, let you know, that it came to a Hearing before the late Sir *Joseph Jekyll*, then Master of the Rolls, in the Year 1726. Now, as the chief Point, in dispute, was of what Kind, or Importance, the Business of a Manager was, or in what it principally consist'd; it could not be suppos'd, that the most learned Council could be so well appris'd of the Nature of it, as one who had himself gone through the Care, and Fatigue of it. I was therefore encourag'd by our Council, to speak to that particular Head my self; which I confess I was glad he suffer'd me to undertake; but when I tell you, that two of the learned Council against us, came, afterwards, to be successively Lord Chancellors, it sets my Presumption in a Light, that I still tremble to shew it in: But however, not to assume more Merit from its Success, than was really its due, I ought fairly to let you know, that I was not so hardy, as to deliver my Pleading without Notes in my Hand, of the Heads I intended to enlarge upon; for though I thought I could conquer my Fear, I could not be so sure of my Memory: But when it came to the critical

Moment,

Moment, the Dread, and Apprehension of what I had undertaken, so disconcerted my Courage, that though I had been us'd to talk to above Fifty Thousand different People every Winter, for upwards of Thirty Years together; an involuntary, and unaffected Proof of my Confusion, fell from my Eyes; and, as I found myself quite out of my Element, I seem'd rather gasping for Life, than in a condition to cope with the eminent Orators, against me. But however, I soon found, from the favourable Attention of my Hearers, that my Diffidence had done me no Disservice: And as the Truth, I was to speak to, needed no Ornament of Words, I deliver'd it, in the plain manner following, *viz.*

In this Cause, Sir, I humbly conceive, there are but two Points, that admit of any material Dispute. The first is, Whether Sir *Richard Steel*, is as much oblig'd to do the Duty, and Business of a Manager, as either *Wilks*, *Booth*, or *Cibber*: And the second is, Whether, by Sir *Richard's* totally withdrawing himself from the Business of a Manager, the Defendants are justifiable, in charging to each of themselves the 1 l. 13 s. 4 d *per Diem*, for their particular Pains, and Care, in carrying on the whole Affairs of the Stage, without any Assistance from Sir *Richard Steel*.

As to the First, if I dont mistake the Words of the Assignment, there is a Clause in it, that says, All Matters relating to the Government, or Management of the Theatre, shall be concluded by a Majority of Voices. Now I presume, Sir, there is no room left to alledge, that Sir *Richard* was ever refus'd his Voice, though in above three Years, he never desired, to give it: And I believe there will be as little room to say, that he could have a Voice, if he were not a Manager. But, Sir, his being a Manager is so self-evident, that it seems amazing how he could conceive, that he was to take the Profits, and Advantages of a Manager, without doing the Duty of it. And I will be bold to say, Sir, that his Assignment of the Patent, to *Wilks*, *Booth*, and *Cibber*.

*ber*, in no one Part of it, by the severest Construction in the World, can be wrested to throw the heavy Burthen of the Management only upon their Shoulders. Nor does it appear, Sir, that either in his Bill, or in his Answer to our Cross-Bill, he has offer'd, any Hint, or Glimpse of a Reason, for his withdrawing from the Management, at all; or so much as pretend, from the Time complain'd of, that he ever took the least part of his Share of it. Now, Sir, however unaccountable this Conduct of Sir *Richard* may seem, we will still allow, that he had some Cause for it; but whether or no, that Cause, was a reasonable one, your Honour will the better judge, if I may be indulg'd in the Liberty of explaining it.

Sir, the Case, in plain Truth and Reality, stands thus: Sir *Richard*, though no Man alive can write better of Oeconomy than himself, yet, perhaps, he is above the Drudgery of practising it: Sir *Richard*, then, was often in want of Money; and while we were in Friendship with him, we often assisted his Occasions: But those Compliances had so unfortunate an Effect, that they only heightened his Importunity, to borrow more, and the more we lent, the less he minded us, or shew'd any Concern for our Welfare. Upon this, Sir, we stopt our Hands, at once, and peremptorily refus'd to advance another Shilling, 'till by the Balance of our Accounts, it became due to him. And this Treatment (though we hope, not in the least unjustifiable) we have Reason to believe so ruffled his Temper, that he at once, was as short with us, as we had been with him; for from that Day, he never more came near us: Nay, Sir, he not only continued to neglect, what he *should* have done, but actually did what he ought *not* to have done: He made an Assignment of his Share, without our Consent, in a manifest Breach of our Agreement: For, Sir, we did not lay that Restriction upon ourselves, for no Reason: We knew, before-hand, what Trouble, and Inconvenience it would be, to unravel, and expose our Accounts to Strangers, who if they were to do us no hurt, by divulging our Secrets, we were sure could  
do

do us no good, by keeping them. If Sir *Richard* had had our common Interest at heart, he would have been as warm in it, as we were, and as tender of hurting it: But supposing his assigning his Share to others, may have done us no great Injury, it is at least, a shrewd Proof, that he did not care whether it did us any, or no. And if the Clause was not strong enough, to restrain him from it, in Law, there was enough in it, to have restrain'd him, in Honour, from breaking it. But take it, in its best Light, it shews him as remiss a Manager, in our Affairs, as he naturally was in his own. Suppose, Sir, we had all been as careless as himself, which I can't find he has any more Right to be, than we have, must not our whole Affair have fallen to Ruin? And may we not, by a parity of Reason suppose, that by his Neglect a fourth Part of it *does* fall to Ruin? But, Sir, there is a particular Reason to believe, that, from our want of Sir *Richard*, more, than a fourth Part *does* suffer by it: His Rank and Figure, in the World, while he gave us the Assistance of them, were of extraordinary Service to us: He had an easier access, and a more regarded Audience at Court, than our low Station of Life could pretend to, when our Interest wanted (as it often did) a particular Solicitation there. But since we have been depriv'd of him, the very End, the very Consideration of his Share in our Profits, is not perform'd on his Part. And will Sir *Richard*, then, make us no Compensation, for so valuable a Loss, in our Interests, and so palpable an Addition to our Labour? I am afraid, Sir, if we were all to be as indolent, in the Managing-part, as Sir *Richard* presumes he has a Right to be; our Patent would soon run us, as many Hundreds, in Debt, as he has had (and still seems willing to have) his Share of, for doing of nothing.

Sir, our next Point, in question, is Whether *Wilks*, *Booth*, and *Cibber*, are justifiable, in charging the *1l. 13s. 4d. per Diem*, for their extraordinary Management, in the absence of Sir *Richard Steel*. I doubt, Sir, it will be hard to come to the Solution of



of this Point, unless we may be a little indulg'd, in setting forth, what is the daily, and necessary Business, and Duty of a Manager. But, Sir, we will endeavour to be as short, as the Circumstances will admit of.

Sir, by our Books, it is apparent, that the Managers have under their Care, no less than One Hundred, and Forty Persons, in constant, daily Pay: And among such Numbers, it will be no wonder, if a great many of them are unskilful, idle, and sometimes untractable; all which Tempers are to be led, or driven, watch'd, and restrain'd by the continual skill, care, and patience of the Managers. Every Manager is oblig'd, in his turn, to attend two or three Hours every Morning, at the Rehearsal of Plays, and other Entertainments for the Stage, or else every Rehearsal would be but a rude meeting of Mirth and Jollity. The same Attendance, is as necessary at every Play, during the time of its publick Action, in which one, or more of us, have constantly been punctual, whether we have had any part, in the Play, then acted or not. A Manager ought to be at the Reading of every new Play, when it is first offer'd to the Stage, tho' there are seldom one of those Plays in twenty, which upon hearing, proves to be fit for it, and upon such Occasions the Attendance must be allow'd, to be as painfully tedious, as the getting rid of the Authors of such Plays, must be disagreeable, and difficult. Besides this, Sir, a Manager, is to order all new Cloaths, to assist in the Fancy, and Propriety of them, to limit the Expence, and to withstand the unreasonable Importunities of some, that are apt to think themselves injur'd, if they are not finer than their Fellows. A Manager is to direct and oversee the Painters, Machinists, Musicians, Singers, and Dancers; to have an Eye upon the Door-keepers, Under-Servants, and Officers, that without such Care, are too often apt to defraud us, or neglect their Duty.

And all this, Sir, and more, much more, which we hope will be needless to trouble you with, have we done every Day.

Day, without the least Assistance from Sir *Richard*, even at times when the Concern, and Labour of our Parts, upon the Stage, have made it very difficult, and irksome to go thro' with it.

In this Place, Sir, it may be worth observing, that Sir *Richard*, in his Answer to our Cross-Bill, seems to value himself, upon *Cibber's* confessing, in the Dedication of a Play, which he made to Sir *Richard*, that he (Sir *Richard*) had done the Stage very considerable Service, by leading the Town to our Plays, and filling our Houses, by the Force and Influence of his *Tatlers*. But Sir *Richard* forgets, that those *Tatlers* were written in the late Queen's Reign, long before he was admitted to a Share in the Playhouse: And in truth, Sir, it was our real Sense of those Obligations, and Sir *Richard's* assuring us they should be continued, that first and chiefly inclin'd us to invite him to share the Profits of our Labours, upon such farther Conditions, as in his Assignment of the Patent to us, are specified. And, Sir, as *Cibber's* publick Acknowledgment of those Favours is at the same Time an equal Proof of Sir *Richard's* Power to continue them; so Sir, we hope, it carries an equal Probability, that without his Promise to use that Power, he would never have been thought on, much less have been invited by us, into a Joint-Management of the Stage, and into a Share of the Profits: And indeed what Pretence could he have form'd, for asking a Patent from the Crown, had he been possess'd of no eminent Qualities, but in common with other Men? But, Sir, all these Advantages, all these Hopes, nay Certainities of greater Profits, from those great Qualities, have we been utterly depriv'd of by the wilful, and unexpected Neglect of Sir *Richard*. But we find, Sir, it is a common thing, in the Practice of Mankind, to justify one Error, by committing another: For Sir *Richard* has not only refus'd us the extraordinary Assistance, which he is able, and bound to give us; but on the contrary, to our great Expence, and loss of Time, now calls us to account, in this Honourable Court, for the Wrong we have

done him, in not doing his Business of a Manager, for nothing. But, Sir, Sir *Richard* has not met with such Treatment from us: He has not writ Plays for us, for *Nothing*, we paid him very well, and in an extraordinary Manner, for his late Comedy of the *Conscious Lovers*: And though, in writing that Play, he had more Assistance from one of the Managers, than becomes me to enlarge upon, of which Evidence has been given upon Oath, by several of our Actors; yet, Sir, he was allow'd the full, and particular Profits of that Play, as an Author, which amounted to Three Hundred Pounds, besides about Three Hundred more, which he receiv'd as a Joint-Sharer of the general Profits, that arose from it. Now, Sir, though the Managers are not all of them able to write Plays, yet they have all of them been able to do (I won't say, as good, but at least) as profitable a thing. They have invented, and adorn'd a Spectacle, that for forty Days together has brought more Money, to the Houle, than the best Play that ever was writ. The Spectacle, I mean, Sir, is that of the Coronation-Ceremony of *Anna Bullen*: And though we allow a good Play to be the more laudable Performance, yet, Sir, in the profitable Part of it, there is no Comparison. If therefore our Spectacle brought in as much, or more Money, than Sir *Richard's* Comedy, what is there, on his side but Usage, that intitles him, to be paid for one, more than we are. for t'other? But then, Sir, if he is so profitably distinguish'd for his Play, if we yield him up the Preference, and pay him for his extraordinary Composition, and take nothing for our own, tho' it turn'd out more to our common Profit; sure, Sir, while we do such extraordinary Duty, as Managers, and while he neglects his Share of that Duty, he cannot grudge us the moderate Demand we make for our separate Labour?

To conclude, Sir, if by our constant Attendance, our Care, our Anxiety (not to mention the disagreeable Contests, we sometimes meet with, both within, and without Doors, in the Management of our Theatre) we have not only sav'd the whole from Ruin, which,

which, if we had all follow'd Sir *Richard's* Example, could not have been avoided ; I say, Sir, if we have still made it so valuable an Income to him, without his giving us the least Assistance for several Years past ; we hope, Sir, that the poor Labourers, that have done all this for Sir *Richard*, will not be thought unworthy of their Hire.

How far our Affairs, being set in this particular Light, might assist our Cause, may be of no great Importance to guess ; but the Issue of it was this : That Sir *Richard* not having made any Objection, to what we had charg'd for Management, for three Years together ; and as our Proceedings had been all transacted, in open Day, without any clandestine Intention of Fraud ; we were allow'd the Sums, in dispute, above-mention'd ; and Sir *Richard* not being advis'd, to appeal to the Lord-Chancellor, both Parties paid their own Costs, and thought it their mutual Interest, to let this be the last of their Law-suits.

And now, gentle Reader, I ask Pardon, for so long an Imposition on your Patience : For though I may have no ill Opinion of this Matter myself ; yet to you, I can very easily conceive it may have been tedious. You are therefore, at your own Liberty of charging the whole Impertinence of it, either to the Weakness of my Judgment, or the Strength of my Vanity ; and I will so far join in your Censure, that I farther confess, I have been so impatient to give it you, that you have had it, out of its turn : For some Years before this Suit was commenc'd, there were other Facts, that ought to have had a Precedence in my History : But that, I dare say, is an Oversight you will easily excuse, provided you afterwards find them worth reading. However, as to that Point, I must take my chance, and shall therefore proceed to speak of the Theatre, which was order'd by his late Majesty to be erected in the great old Hall at *Hampton-Court* ; where Plays were intended to have been acted twice a Week, during the Summer-Season. But before the Theatre could be finish'd, above half the Month of *September* being elaps'd,

laps'd, there were but seven Plays acted before the Court return'd to *London*. This throwing open a Theatre, in a Royal Palace, seem'd to be reviving the Old *English* hospitable Grandeur, where the lowest Rank of neighbouring Subjects might make themselves merry at Court, without being laugh'd at themselves. In former Reigns, Theatrical Entertainments at the Royal Palaces had been perform'd at vast Expence, as appears by the Description of the Decorations, in several of *Ben. Johnson's* Masques, in *King James* and *Charles the First's* time; many curious, and original Draughts of which, by *Sir Inigo Jones*, I have seen in the *Museum* of our greatest Master, and Patron of Arts, and Architecture, whom it would be a needless Liberty to name. But when our civil Wars ended in the Decadence of Monarchy, it was then an Honour to the Stage, to have fallen with it: Yet, after the Restoration of *Charles II.* some faint Attempts were made to revive these Theatrical Spectacles at Court; but I have met with no Account of above one Masque acted there, by the Nobility; which was that of *Calisto*, written by *Crown*, the Author of *Sir Courtly Nice*. For what Reason *Crown* was chosen to that Honour, rather than *Dryden*, who was then Poet-Laureat, and out of all comparison his Superior, in Poetry, may seem surprizing: But if we consider the Offence which the then Duke of *Buckingham* took at the Character of *Zimri*, in *Dryden's Absalom*, &c. (which might probably be a Return to his Grace's *Drawcanfir*, in the *Rebearfal*) we may suppose the Prejudice and Recommendation of so illustrious a Pretender to Poetry, might prevail at Court, to give *Crown* this Preference. In the same Reign, the King had his Comedians at *Windsor*, but upon a particular Establishment; for tho' they acted in *St. George's Hall*, within the Royal Palace yet (as I have been inform'd by an Eye-witness) they were permitted to take Money at the Door, of every Spectator; whether this was an Indulgence, in Conscience, I cannot say; but it was a common Report among the principal Actors, when I first came into the



*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 317

the *Theatre-Royal* in 1690, that there was then, due to the Company from that Court, about One Thousand Five Hundred Pounds for Plays commanded, &c. and yet it was the general Complaint, in that Prince's Reign, that he paid too much Ready-money for his Pleasures: But these Assertions I only give, as I receiv'd them, without being answerable for their Reality. This Theatrical Anecdote, however, puts me in mind of one of a more private Nature, which I had from old solemn *Roman*, the late Actor of venerable Memory. *Roman*, then a Youth, and fam'd for his Voice, was appointed to sing some Part in a Concert of Musick at the private Lodgings of Mrs. *Gwin*; at which were only present, the King, the Duke of York, and one or two more, who were usually admitted upon those detached Parties of Pleasure. When the Performance was ended, the King express'd himself highly pleas'd, and gave it extraordinary Commendations: Then, Sir, said the Lady, to shew you don't speak like a Courtier, I hope you will make the Performers a handsom Present: The King said, he had no Money about him, and ask'd the Duke if he had any? To which the Duke reply'd, I believe, Sir, not above a Guinea or two. Upon which the laughing Lady, turning to the People about her, and making bold with the King's common Expression, cry'd, *Od's Fish! What Company am I got into!*

Whether the reverend Historian of his *Own Time*, among the many other Reasons of the same Kind, he might have for stiling this Fair One the *indiscreetest, and wildest Creature, that ever was in a Court*, might know this to be one of them, I can't say: But if we consider her, in all the Disadvantages of her Rank, and Education, she does not appear to have had any criminal Errors more remarkable, than her Sex's Frailty to answer for: And, if the same Author in his latter end of that Prince's Life, seems to reproach his Memory, with too kind a Concern for her support, we may allow, that it becomes a Bishop to have had no Eyes, or Taste for the frivolous Charms or playful *Badinage*

### 313 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

*dinge* of a King's Mistress: Yet, if the common Fame of her may be believ'd, which in my Memory was not doubted, she had less to be laid to her Charge, than any other of those Ladies, who were in the same State of Preferment: She never meddled in Matters of serious Moment, or was the Tool of working Politicians: Never broke into those amorous Infidelities, which others, in that grave Author are accus'd of; but was as visibly distinguish'd, by her particular personal Inclination to the King as her Rivals were by their Titles, and Grandeur. Give me leave to carry (perhaps, the Partiality of) my Observation a little farther. The same Author, in the same Page, 263, tells us, That, " Another of the King's Mistresses, the Daughter of a Clergyman, Mrs. *Roberts*, in whom her first Education had so deep a Root, that tho' she fell into many scandalous Disorders, with very dismal Adventures in them all, yet a Principle of Religion was so deep laid in her, that tho' it did not restrain her, yet it kept alive in her, such a constant Horror of Sin, that she was never easy, in an ill course, and died with a great Sense of her former ill Life.

To all this let us give an implicit Credit: Here is the Account of a frail Sinner made up, with a Reverend Witness! Yet I cannot, but lament that this Mired Historian, who seems to know more personal Secrets, than any that ever writ before him, should not have been as inquisitive after the last Hours of our other fair Offender, whose Repentance I have been unquestionably inform'd, appear'd in all the contrite Symptoms of a Christian Sincerity. If therefore you find I am so much concern'd to make this favourable mention of the one, because she was a Sister of the *Theatre*, why may not— But I dare not be so presumptuous, so uncharitably bold, as to suppose the other was spoken better of, merely because she was the Daughter of a *Clergyman*. Well, and what then? What's all this idle Prate, you may say, to the matter in hand? Why,

I say

*The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.* 319

I say your Question is a little too critical; and if you won't give an Author leave, now and then, to embellish his Work by a natural Reflection, you are an ungentle Reader. But I have done with my Digression, and return to our Theatre at *Hampton-Court*, where I am not sure the Reader, be he ever so wise, will meet with any thing more worth his Notice: However, if he happens to read as I write for want of something better to do, he will go on; and perhaps, wonder when I tell him, that

A Play presented at Court, or acted on a publick Stage, seems to their different Auditors, a different Entertainment. Now hear my Reason for it. In the common Theatre, the Guests are at home, where the politer Forms of Good-breeding are not so nicely regarded: Every one there, falls to, and likes or finds Fault, according to his natural Taste, or Appetite. At Court, where the Prince gives the Treat, and honours the Table with his own Presence, the Audience is under the Restraint of a Circle, where Laughter, or Applause, rais'd higher than a Whisper, would be star'd at. At a publick Play they are both let loose, even 'till the Actor is, sometimes, pleas'd with his not being able to be heard, for the Clamour of them. But this Coldness or Decency of Attention, at Court, I observ'd had but a melancholy Effect, upon the impatient Vanity of some of our Actors, who seem'd inconsolable, when their flashy Endeavours to please had pass'd unheeded: Their not considering where they were, quite disconcerted them; nor could they recover their Spirits, 'till from the lowest Rank of the Audience, some gaping *John*, or *Joan*, in the fullness of their Hearts, roar'd out their Approbation: And indeed, such a natural Instance of honest Simplicity, a Prince himself, whose Indulgence knows where to make Allowances, might reasonably smile at, and perhaps not think it the worst part of his Entertainment. Yet it must be own'd, that an Audience may be as well too much reserv'd, as too profuse of their Applause: For though, it is possible a *Betterton* would not have been discourag'd, from throwing out an Excellence, or elated into

an

an Error, by his Auditors being too little, or too much pleas'd, yet as Actors of his Judgment are Rarities; those of less Judgment may sink into a Flatness in their Performance, for want of that Applause, which from the generality of Judges, they might perhaps, have some Pretence to: And the Auditor, when not seeming to feel what ought to affect him, may rob himself of something more, that he might have had, by giving the Actor his due, who measures out his Power to please, according to the Value he sets upon his Hearer's Taste, or Capacity. But however, as we were not, here, itinerant Adventurers, and had properly but one Royal Auditor to please; after that Honour was attain'd to, the rest of our Ambition had little to look after: And that the King was often pleas'd, we were not only assur'd, by those who had the Honour to be near him; but could see it, from the frequent Satisfaction in his Looks at particular Scenes, and Passages: One Instance of which I am tempted to relate, because it was at a Speech, that might more naturally affect a Sovereign Prince, than any private Spectator. In *Shakespeare's Harry the Eighth*; that King commands the Cardinal to write circular Letters of Indemnity, into every County, where the Payment of certain heavy Taxes had been disputed: Upon which the Cardinal whispers the following Directions to his Secretary *Cromwell*:

————— *A Word with you:*  
*Let there be Letters writ to every Shire,*  
*Of the King's Grace, and Pardon: The griev'd Commons*  
*Hardly conceive of me. Let it be nois'd,*  
*That through our Intercession, this Revokement,*  
*And Pardon comes. ————— I shall anon advise you*  
*Farther, in the Proceeding —————*

The Solicitude of this Spiritual Minister, in filching from his Master the Grace, and Merit of a good Action, and dressing up himself in it, while himself had been Author of the Evil complain'd of, was so easy a Stroke of his Temporal Conscience, that it seem'd to raise  
the

the King into something more than a Smile, whenever that Play came before him : And I had a more distinct Occasion, to observe this Effect ; because my proper Stand on the Stage, when I spoke the Lines, required me to be near the Box, where the King usually sat. In a Word, this Play is so true a Dramatick Chronicle of an old *English* Court, and where the Character of *Harry the Eighth* is so exactly drawn, even to a humourous Likeness, that it may be no wonder why his Majesty's particular Taste for it, should have commanded it three several times in one Winter.

This too calls to my Memory an extravagant Pleasantry of Sir *Richard Steel*, who being ask'd by a grave Nobleman, after the same Play had been presented at *Hampton-Court*, how the King lik'd it ; reply'd, *So terribly well, my Lord, that I was afraid I should have lost all my Actors ! For I was not sure, the King would not keep them to fill the Posts at Court, that he saw them so fit for in the Play.*

It may be imagin'd, that giving Plays to the People at such a distance from *London*, could not but be attended with an extraordinary Expence ; and it was some Difficulty, when they were first talk'd of to bring them under a moderate Sum ; I shall therefore, in as few Words, as possible, give a particular of what Establishment they were then brought to ; that in case the same Entertainments, should at any time hereafter be call'd to the same Place, future Courts may judge, how far the Precedent may stand good, or need an Alteration.

Though the stated Fee, for a Play acted, at *Whitehall* had been formerly, but Twenty Pounds ; yet, as that hinder'd not the Company's acting on the same Day, at the publick Theatre, that Sum was almost all clear Profits to them : But this Circumstance not being practicable, when they were commanded to *Hampton-Court*, a new, and extraordinary Charge was unavoidable : The Managers, therefore, not to inflame it, desired no

Con-



Consideration, for their own Labour, farther than the Honour of being employ'd, in his Majesty's Commands; and, if the other Actors might be allow'd, each their Day's Pay, and travelling Charges, they should hold themselves ready, to act any Play, there, at a Day's Warning: And that the Trouble might be less, by being divided, the Lord-Chamberlain was pleas'd to let us know, that the Household-Musick, the Wax Lights, and a *Chaise-Marine*, to carry our moving Wardrobe to every different Play, should be under the Charge of the proper Officers. Notwithstanding these Assistances, the Expence of every play amounted to Fifty Pounds: Which Account, when all was over, was not only allow'd us, but his Majesty was graciously pleas'd to give the Managers Two Hundred Pounds more, for their particular Performance, and Trouble, in only seven times acting. Which last Sum, tho' it might not be too much, for a Sovereign Prince to give, it was certainly more than our utmost Merit ought to have hop'd for: And I confess, when I receiv'd the Order for the Money, from his Grace the Duke of Newcastle, then Lord-Chamberlain, I was so surpris'd, that I imagin'd his Grace's Favour, or Recommendation of our Readiness, or Diligence, must have contributed to so high a Consideration of it, and was offering my Acknowledgments, as I thought them due: but was soon stopt short, by his Grace's Declaration, That we had no Obligations for it, but to the King himself, who had given it, from no other Motive, than his own Bounty. Now whether we may suppose that Cardinal *Wolsey* (as you see *Shakespeare* has drawn him) would silently have taken such low Acknowledgments to himself, perhaps may be as little worth consideration, as my mentioning this Circumstance has been necessary: But if it is due to the Honour and Integrity of the (then) Lord-Chamberlain, I cannot think it wholly impertinent.

Since that time, there has been but one Play given at *Hampton Court*, which was for the Entertainment of the Duke of *Lorrain*; and for which  
his

his present Majesty was pleas'd to order us a Hundred Pounds.

The Reader may, now plainly see, that I am ransacking my Memory, for such remaining scraps of Theatrical History, as may not, perhaps, be worth his Notice: But if they are such as tempt me to write them, why may I not hope, that in this wide World, there may be many an idle Soul, no wiser than myself, who may be equally tempted to read them?

I have so often had occasion to compare the State of the Stage to the State of a Nation, that I yet feel a Reluctancy to drop the Comparison, or speak of the one, without some Application to the other. How many Reigns, then, do I remember, from that of *Charles* the Second, through all which, there has been, from one half of the People, or the other, a succession of Clamour, against every different Ministry for the Time being? And yet, let the Cause of this Clamour have been never so well grounded, it is impossible, but that some of those Ministers must have been wiser, and honest Men, than others: If this be true, as true, I believe it is, why may I not then say, as some Fool in a *French Play* does, upon a like Occasion--- *Justement, comme chez nous!* 'Twas exactly the same with our Management! let us have done never so well, we could not please every body: All I can say, in our Defence, is, that though many good Judges, might possibly conceive how the State of the Stage might have been mended, yet the best of them never pretended, to remember the time when it was better! or could shew us the way to make their imaginary Amendments practicable.

For though I have often allow'd, that our best Merit, as Actors, was never equal to that of our Predecessors, yet I will venture to say, that in all its Branches, the Stage had never been under so just, so prosperous, and so settled a Regulation, for forty Years before, as it was at the Time I am speaking of. The most plausible Objection to our Administration,

stration, seem'd to be, that we took no Care to breed up young Actors, to succeed us; and this was imputed as the greater Fault, because it was taken for granted, that it was a Matter as easy as planting so many Cabbages: Now might not a Court be as well reproach'd, for not breeding up a succession of complete Ministers? And yet it is evident, that if Providence, or Nature don't supply us with both, the State and the Stage will be but poorly supported. If a Man of an ample Fortune, should take it into his Head, to give a younger Son an extraordinary Allowance, in order to breed him a great Poet, what might not we suppose would be the Odds, that his Trouble, and Money, would be all thrown away? Not more, than it would be, against the Master of a Theatre, who should say, this, or that young Man, I will take care shall be an excellent Actor! Let it be our Excuse then, for that mistaken Charge against us; that since there was no Garden, or Market, where accomplish'd Actors grew, or were to be sold, we could only pick them up, as we do Pebbles of Value, by Chance: We may polish a Thousand, before we find one, fit to make a Figure, in the Lid of a Snuff-Box. And how few soever we were able to produce, it is no Proof, that we were not always in search of them: Yet, at worst, it was allow'd, that our Deficiency of Men Actors, was not so visible, as our scarcity of tolerable Women: But when it is consider'd, that the Life of Youth and Beauty is too short for the bringing an Actress to her Perfection; were I to mention too, the many frail fair Ones, I remember, who, before they could arrive to their Theatrical Maturity, were feloniously stolen from the Tree, it would rather be thought our Misfortune, than our Fault, that we were not better provided.

Even the Laws of a Nunnery, we find, are thought no sufficient Security against Temptations, without iron Grates, and high Walls to inforce them; which the Architecture of a Theatre will not so properly admit of: And yet, methinks, Beauty  
that

that has not those artificial Fortresses about it, that has no Defence but its natural Virtue (which upon the Stage has more than once been met with) makes a much more meritorious Figure, in Life, than that immur'd Virtue, which could never be try'd. But alas! as the poor Stage, is but the Show-glass to a Toy-shop, we must not wonder, if now and then, some of the Bawbles should find a Purchaser.

However, as to say more, or less than Truth, are equally unfaithful in an Historian: I cannot but own, that in the Government of the Theatre, I have known many Instances, where the Merit of promising Actors has not always been brought forward, with the Regard, or Favour, it had a Claim to: And if I put my Reader in mind, that in the early Part of this Work, I have shewn, through what continued Difficulties, and Discouragements I myself made my way up the Hill of Preferment; he may justly call it, too strong a Glare of my Vanity: I am afraid he is in the right; but I pretend not to be one of those chaste Authors, that know how to write without it: When Truth is to be told it may be as much Chance, as Choice, if it happens to turn out in my Favour: But to shew that this was true of others, as well as myself, *Booth* shall be another Instance. In 1707, when *Swiney* was the only Master of the Company in the *Hay-Market*; *Wilks*, though he was, then, but an hired Actor himself, rather chose to govern, and give Orders, than to receive them; and was so jealous of *Booth's* rising, that with a high Hand, he gave the Part of *Pierre*, in *Venice Preserv'd*, to *Mills* the elder, who (not to undervalue him) was out of Sight, in the Pretensions that *Booth*, then young, as he was, had to the same Part: And this very Discouragement so strongly affected him, that not long after, when several of us became Sharers with *Swiney*, *Booth* rather chose to risque his Fortune, with the old Patentee in *Drury-Lane*, than come into our Interest, where he saw he was like to meet with more of those Partialities. And yet again, *Booth* himself, when he came

326 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

to be a Manager, would sometimes suffer his Judgment to be blinded by his Inclination to Actors, whom the Town seem'd to have but an indifferent Opinion of. This again, inclines me to ask another of my odd Questions, *viz.* Have we never seen the same Passions govern a Court! How many white Stuffs, and great Places do we find, in our Histories, have been laid at the Feet of a Monarch, because they chose not to give way to a Rival, in Power, or hold a second Place in his Favour? How many *Whigs*, and *Tories* have chang'd their Parties, when their good or bad Pretensions have met with a Check to their higher Preferment?

Thus, we see, let the Degrees, and Rank of Men, be ever so unequal, Nature throws out their Passions, from the same Motives; 'tis not the Eminence, or Lowliness of either, that makes the one, when provok'd, more or less a reasonable Creature than the other: The Courtier, and the Comedian, when their Ambition is out of Humour, take just the same Measures to right themselves.

If this familiar Stile of talking should, in the Nostils of Gravity, and Wisdom, smell a little too much of the Presumptuous, or the Pragmatical, I will, at least, descend lower, in my Apology for it, by calling to my Assistance the old, humble Proverb, *viz.* 'Tis an ill Bird that, &c. Why then should I debase my Profession, by setting it in vulgar Lights, when I may shew it to more favourable Advantages? And when I speak of our Errors, why may I not extenuate them by illustrious Examples? or by not allowing them greater, than the greatest Men have been subject to? Or why, indeed, may I not suppose, that a sensible Reader will rather laugh, than look grave, at the Pomp of my Parallels?

Now, as I am tied down, to the Veracity of an Historian, whose Facts cannot be supposed, like those in a Romance, to be in the Choice of the Author, to make them more marvellous, by Invention, if



if I should happen to sink into a little farther Insignificance, let the simple Truth of what I have farther to say, be my Excuse for it. I am oblig'd therefore, to make the Experiment, by shewing you the Conduct of our Theatrical Ministry in such Lights, as on various Occasions it appear'd in.

Though *Wilks* had more Industry, and Application, than any Actor I had ever known, yet we found it possible that those necessary Qualities might sometimes be so misconducted, as not only to make them useless, but hurtful to our Common-wealth; for while he was impatient to be foremost, in every thing, he frequently shock'd the honest Ambition of others, whose Measures might have been more serviceable, could his Jealousy have given way to them. His own Regards for himself, therefore, were, to avoid a disagreeable Dispute with him, too often comply'd with: But this leaving his Diligence, to his own Conduct, made us, in some Instances, pay dearly for it: For Example; he would take as much, or more Pains in forwarding to the Stage, the Water-gruel Work of some insipid Author, that happen'd rightly to make his Court to him, than he would for the best Play, wherein it was not his Fortune to be chosen for the best Character. So great was his Impatience to be employ'd, that I scarce remember, in twenty Years, above one profitable Play, we could get to be reviv'd, wherein he found he was to make no considerable Figure, independent of him: But the *Tempest* having done Wonders formerly, he could not form any Pretensions, to let it lie longer dormant: However, his Coldness to it was so visible, that he took all Occasions to postpone, and discourage its Progress, by frequently taking up the morning Stage with something more to his Mind. Having been myself particularly solicitous for the reviving this Play, *Dogget* (for this was before *Booth* came into the Management) consented that the extraordinary Decorations, and Habits, should be left to my Care, and Direction, as the fittest Person, whose Temper could jostle through

the petulant Opposition, that he knew *Wilks* would be always offering to it, because he had but a middling Part in it, that of *Ferdinand*: Notwithstanding which, so it happen'd, that the Success of it shew'd (not to take from the Merit of *Wilks*) that it was possible to have good Audiences, without his extraordinary Assistance. In the first six Days of acting it, we paid all our constant, and incidental Expence, and shar'd each of us an hundred Pounds: The greatest Profit, that in so little a Time had yet been known within my Memory! But, alas! what was paltry Pelf, to Glory? That was the darling Passion of *Wilks's* Heart! and not to advance in it, was, to so jealous an Ambition, a painful Retreat, a meer Shade to his Laurels! and the common Benefit was but a poor Equivalent, to his want of particular Applause! To conclude, not Prince *Lewis* of *Baden*, though a Confederate General, with the Duke of *Marlborough*, was more inconsolable, upon the memorable Victory at *Blenheim*, at which he was not present, than our Theatrical Hero was, to see any Action prosperous, that he was not himself at the Head of. If this then was an Infirmary in *Wilks*, why may not my shewing the same Weakness in so great a Man, mollify the Imputation, and keep his Memory in Countenance?

This laudable Appetite for Fame, in *Wilks*, was not, however to be fed, without that constant Labour, which only himself was able to come up to: He therefore bethought him of the means, to lessen the Fatigue, and at the same Time, to heighten his Reputation; which was by giving up now, and then, a Part to some raw Actor, who he was sure would disgrace it, and consequently put the Audience in mind of his superior Performance: Among this sort of Indulgences to young Actors, he happen'd once to make a Mistake, that set his Views in a clear Light. The best Critics, I believe, will allow, that in *Shakespeare's Macbeth*, there are in the Part of *Macduff* two Scenes, the one of Terror, in the second Act; and the other of Com-

passion,

passion, in the fourth, equal to any that dramatick Poetry has produc'd: These Scenes *Wilks* had acted with Success, tho' far short of that happier Skill and Grace, which *Monfort* had formerly shewn, in them. Such a Part however, one might imagine would be one of the last, a good Actor would chuse to part with: But *Wilks* was of a different Opinion; for *Macbeth* was thrice as long, had more great Scenes of Action, and bore the Name of the Play: Now to be a second in any Play, was what he did not much care for, and had been seldom us'd to: This Part of *Macduff*, therefore, he had given to one *Williams*, as yet no extraordinary, though a promising Actor. *Williams*, in the Simplicity of his Heart, immediately told *Booth*, what a Favour *Wilks* had done him. *Booth*, as he had reason, thought *Wilks* had here carried his Indulgence and his Authority a little too far; for as *Booth* had no better a Part, in the same Play, than that of *Banquo*, he found himself too much disregarded, in letting so young an Actor take Place of him: *Booth*, therefore, who knew the Value of *Macduff*, proposed to do it himself, and to give *Banquo* to *Williams*; and to make him farther amends, offer'd him any other of his Parts that he thought might be of Service to him. *Williams* was content with the Exchange, and thankful for the Promise. This Scheme, indeed (had it taken Effect) might have been an Ease to *Wilks*, and possibly no Disadvantage to the Play; but softly—That was not what we had a Mind to! No sooner then, came this Proposal to *Wilks*, but off went the Masque, and out came the Secret! For though *Wilks* wanted to be eas'd of the Part, he did not desire to be excell'd in it; and as he was not sure but that might be the Case, if *Booth* were to act it, he wisely retracted his own Project, took *Macduff* again to himself, and while he liv'd, never had a Thought of running the same Hazard, by any farther Offer to resign it.

Here, I confess, I am at a Loss for a Fact in History, to which this can be a Parallel! To be weary of a Post, even to a real Desire of resigning it; and

yet to chuse, rather to drudge on in it, than suffer it to be well supplied) though to share in that Advantage) is a Delicacy of Ambition, that *Machiavil* himself has made no mention of: Or if in old *Rome*, the Jealousy of any pretended Patriot, equally inclin'd to abdicate his Office, may have come up to it; 'tis more than my reading remembers.

As nothing can be more impertinent, than shewing too frequent a Fear, to be thought so, I will, without farther Apology, rather risque that Imputation, than not tell you another Story much to the same Purpose, and of no more Consequence than my last. To make you understand it however, a little Preface will be necessary.

If the Merit of an Actor (as it certainly does) consists more in the Quality, than the Quantity of his Labour; the other Managers had no visible Reason to think, this needless Ambition of *Wilks*, in being so often, and sometimes so unnecessarily employ'd, gave him any Title to a Superiority; especially when our Articles of Agreement, had allow'd us all to be equal. But what are narrow Contracts to great Souls with growing Desires. \* *Wilks* therefore, who thought himself lessen'd, in appealing to any Judgment, but his own, plainly discovered by his restless Behaviour (though he did not care to speak out) that he thought he had a Right to some higher Consideration, for his Performance: This was often *Booth's* Opinion, as well as my own. It must be farther observ'd, that he actually had a separate Allowance of Fifty Pounds a Year, for writing our daily Play-Bills, for the Printer: Which Province, to say the Truth, was the only one we car'd to trust to his particular Intendance, or could find out for a Pretence to distinguish him. But, to speak a plainer Truth, this Pension, which was no part of our original Agreement, was merely paid to keep him quiet, and not that we thought it due to so insignificant a Charge, as what a Prompter had formerly executed. This being really the Case, his frequent

frequent Complaints of being a Drudge to the Company, grew something more than disagreeable to us: For we could not digest the Imposition of a Man's setting himself to work, and then bringing in his own Bill for it. *Booth*, therefore, who was less easy, than I was, to see him so often setting a Merit upon this Quantity of his Labour, which neither could be our Interest, or his own, to lay upon him; propos'd to me, that we might remove this pretended Grievance, by reviving some Play, that might be likely to live, and be easily acted, without *Wilks's* having any Part in it. About this Time, an unexpected Occasion offer'd itself to put our Project, in practice: What follow'd our Attempt, will be all (if any thing be) worth Observation in my Story.

In 1725, we were call'd upon, in a manner, that could not be resist'd, to revive the *Provok'd Wife*, a Comedy, which, while we found our Account, in keeping the Stage clear of those loose Liberties, it had formerly, too justly been charg'd with; we had laid aside, for some Years. The Author, Sir *John Vanbrugh*, who was conscious of what it had too much of, was prevail'd upon, to substitute a new-written Scene in the Place of one, in the fourth Act, where the Wantonness of his Wit and Humour had (originally) made a Rake talk like a Rake, in the borrow'd Habit of a Clergyman: To avoid which Offence, he chang'd the same Debaucher, into the Undress of a Woman of Quality: Now the Character and Profession of a Fine Lady, not being so indelibly sacred as that of a Churchman; whatever Follies he expos'd, in the Petticoat, kept him at least clear of his former Prophaneness, and were now innocently ridiculous, to the Spectator.

This Play being thus refitted for the Stage, was, as I have observ'd, call'd for from Court, and by many of the Nobility. Now, then, we thought was a proper Time to come to an Explanation with *Wilks*: Accordingly, when the Actors were summon'd to hear  
the



332 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

the Play read, and receive their Parts; I address'd my self to *Wilks*, before them all, and told him, That as the Part of *Constant*, which he seem'd to chuse, was a Character of less Action, than he generally appear'd in, we thought this might be a good Occasion to ease himself, by giving it to another.—Here he look'd grave.—That the Love-Scenes of it were rather serious than gay, or humourous, and therefore might sit very well upon *Booth*.—Down dropt his Brow, and furl'd were his Features.—That if we were never to revive a tolerable Play, without him, what would become of us, in case of his Indisposition?—Here he pretended to stir the Fire.—That as he could have no farther Advantage or Advancement, in his Station to hope for, his acting in this Play was but giving himself an unprofitable Trouble, which neither *Booth*, or I, desired to impose upon him.—Softly.—Now the Pill began to gripe him.—In a Word, this provoking Civility, plung'd him into a Passion, which he was no longer able to contain; out it came, with all the Equipage of unlimited Language, that on such Occasions his Displeasure usually set out with; but when his Reply was stript of those Ornaments, it was plainly this: That he look'd upon all I had said, as a concerted Design, not only to signalize our selves, by laying him aside; but a Contrivance to draw him into the Disfavour of the Nobility, by making it suppos'd his own Choice, that he did not act in a Play so particularly ask'd for; but we should find, he could stand upon his own Bottom, and it was not all our little caballing should get our ends of him: To which I answer'd with some Warmth, That he was mistaken in our Ends; for Those, Sir, said I, you have answer'd already, by shewing the Company, you cannot bear to be left out of any Play. Are not you every Day complaining of your being over-labour'd? And now, upon our first offering to ease you, you fly into a Passion, and pretend to make that a greater Grievance, than t'other: But, Sir, if your being In, or Out of the Play, is a Hardship, you shall impose

impose it upon your self : The Part is in your Hand, and to us it is a Matter of Indifference now, whether you take it, or leave it. Upon this he threw down the Part upon the Table, cross'd his Arms, and sat knocking his Heel, upon the Floor, as seeming to threaten most, when he said least ; but when no Body persuaded him to take it up again, *Booth* not chusing to push the matter too far, but rather to split the Difference of our Dispute, said, That for his Part, he saw no such great matter in acting every Day ; for he believed it the wholsomest Exercise in the World ; it kept the Spirits in motion, and always gave him a good Stomach. Tho' this was, in a manner, giving up the Part to *Wilks*, yet it did not allow, he did us any Favour in receiving it. Here I observ'd Mrs. *Oldfield* began to titter, behind her Fan : But *Wilks* being more intent, upon what *Booth* had said, reply'd, Every one could best feel for himself, but he did not pretend to the Strength of a Pack-horse ; therefore if Mrs. *Oldfield* would chuse any Body else to play with her, he should be very glad to be excus'd : This throwing the Negative upon Mrs. *Oldfield*, was, indeed, a sure way to save himself ; which I could not help taking notice of, by saying, It was making but an ill Compliment, to the Company, to suppose, there was but one Man in it, fit to play an ordinary Part with her. Here Mrs. *Oldfield* got up, and turning me half round to come forward, said with her usual Frankness, Pooh ! you are all a Parcel of Fools, to make such a rout about nothing ! Rightly judging, that the Person, most out of humour, would not be the more displeas'd at her calling us all, by the same Name. As she knew, too, the best way of ending the Debate, would be to help the Weak ; she said, she hop'd Mr. *Wilks* would not so far mind what had past, as to refuse his acting the Part, with her ; for though it might not be so good as he had been us'd to ; yet, she believed, those who had bespoke the Play, would expect to have it done to the best Advantage, and it would make but an odd Story abroad, if it were known, there had  
been

been any Difficulty in that Point among our selves. To conclude, *Wilks* had the Part, and we had all we wanted; which was an Occasion to let him see that the Accident or Choice of one Manager's being more employ'd than another, would never be allow'd a Pretence, for altering our Indentures, or his having an extraordinary Consideration for it.

However disagreeable it might be, to have this unsociable Temper daily to deal with; yet I cannot but say, that from the same impatient Spirit, that had so often hurt us, we still drew valuable Advantages: For as *Wilks* seem'd to have no Joy, in Life, beyond his being distinguish'd on the Stage; we were not only sure of his always doing his best, there himself; but of making others more careful, than without the Rod of so irascible a Temper over them, they would have been. And I much question, if a more temperate, or better Usage of the hired Actors, could have so effectually kept them to Order. Not even *Betterton* (as we have seen) with all his good Sense, his great Fame, and Experience, could, by being only a quiet Example of Industry himself, save his Company from falling, while neither Gentleness could govern, or the Consideration of their common Interest reform them. Diligence, with much the inferior Skill, or Capacity, will beat the best negligent Company, that ever came upon a Stage. But when a certain dreaming Idleness, or jolly Negligence of Rehearsals gets into a Body of the Ignorant, and Incapable (which before *Wilks* came into *Drury-Lane*, when *Powell* was at the Head of them, was the Case of that Company) then, I say, a sensible Spectator might have look'd upon the fallen Stage, as *Portius*, in the Play of *Cato*, does upon his ruin'd Country, and have lamented it, in (something near) the same Exclamation, *viz.*

— *O ye Immortal Bards!*

*What Havock do these Blockheads make among your Works!*

*How are the boasted Labours of an Age,  
Defac'd, and tortur'd, by ungracious Action?*

Of this wicked Doings, *Dryden* too complains in one of his Prologues, at that time, where speaking of such lewd Actors, he closes a Couplet with the following Line, *viz.*

*And murder Plays, which they miscal Reviving.*

The great Share, therefore, that *Wilks*, by his exemplary Diligence, and Impatience of Neglect, in others, had in the Reformation of this Evil, ought in Justice to be remembr'd; and let my own Vanity here take Shame, to itself, when I confess, That had I half his Application, I still think I might have shewn myself twice the Actor, that in my highest State of Favour, I appear'd to be. But, if I have any Excuse for that Neglect (a Fault, which if I loved not Truth, I need not have mentioned) it is that so much of my Attention was taken up in an incessant Labour to guard against our private Animosities, and preserve a Harmony, in our Management, that I hope, and believe, it made ample Amends, for whatever Omission, my Auditors might sometimes know it cost me some pains to conceal. But Nature takes care to bestow her Blessings, with a more equal Hand than Fortune does, and is seldom known to heap too many upon one Man: One tolerable Talent, in an Individual, is enough to preserve him, from being good for nothing; and, if that was not laid to my Charge, as an Actor, I have in this Light too, less to complain of, than to be thankful for.

Before I conclude my History, it may be expected, I should give some further View of these my last  
Cotem-

Cotemporaries of the Theatre, *Wilks*, and *Booth*, in their different acting Capacities. If I were to paint them in the Colours they laid upon one another, their Talents would not be shewn with half the Commendation, I am inclin'd to bestow upon them, when they are left to my own Opinion. But People of the same Profession, are apt to see themselves, in their own clear Glass of Partiality, and look upon their Equals through a Mist of Prejudice. It might be imagin'd too, from the difference of their natural Tempers, that *Wilks* should have been more blind, to the Excellencies of *Booth*, than *Booth* was to those of *Wilks*; but it was not so: *Wilks* would sometimes commend *Booth* to me; but when *Wilks* excell'd, the other was silent: *Booth* seem'd to think nothing valuable, that was not tragically great, or marvellous: Let that be as true, as it may; yet I have often thought, that from his having no Taste of Humour himself, he might be too much inclin'd to depreciate the acting of it in others. The very slight Opinion, which in private Conversation with me, he had of *Wilks's* acting Sir *Harry Wildair*, was certainly more, than could be justified; not only from the general Applause that was against that Opinion (though Applause is not always infallible) but from the visible Capacity which must be allow'd to an Actor, that could carry such slight Materials to such a height of Approbation: For though the Character of *Wildair*, scarce in any one Scene, will stand against a just Criticism; yet in the Whole, there are so many gay, and false Colours of the fine Gentleman, that nothing but a Vivacity in the Performance, proportionably extravagant, could have made them so happily glare, upon a common Audience.

*Wilks*, from his first setting out, certainly form'd his manner of Acting, upon the Model of *Monfort*; as *Booth* did his, on that of *Betterton*. But—*Hana passibus æquis*: I cannot say, either of them came up to their Original, *Wilks* had not that easy regulated Behaviour, or the harmonious Elocution of the  
One,



One, nor *Booth* that conscious Aspect of Intelligence, nor requisite Variation of Voice, that made every Line the Other spoke seem his own, natural, self-deliver'd Sentiment: Yet there is still room for great Commendation of both the first mentioned; which will not be so much diminish'd, in my having said, they were only excell'd by such Predecessors, as it will be rais'd, in venturing to affirm, it will be a longer time, before any Successors will come near them. Thus one of the greatest Praises given to *Virgil* is, That no Successor in Poetry, came so near *Him*, as *He* himself did to *Homer*.

Tho' the Majority of publick Auditors are but bad Judges of Theatrical Action, and are often deceiv'd into their Approbation of what has no solid Pretence to it; yet, as there are no other appointed Judges to appeal to, and as every single Spectator has a Right to be one of them, their Sentence will be definitive, and the Merit of an Actor must, in some degree, be weigh'd by it: By this Law then, *Wilks* was pronounc'd an Excellent Actor; which if the few true Judges did not allow him to be, they were at least too candid to slight, or discourage him. *Booth* and he were Actors so directly opposite in their Manner, that, if either of them could have borrow'd a little of the other's Fault, they would both have been improv'd by it: If *Wilks* had sometimes too violent a Vivacity; *Booth* as often contented himself with too grave a Dignity: The Latter seem'd too much to heave up his Words, as the Other to dart them to the Ear, with too quick, and sharp a Vehemence: Thus *Wilks* would too frequently break into the Time, and Measure of the Harmony, by too many spirited Accents, in one Line; and *Booth*, by too solemn a Regard to Harmony, would as often lose the Necessary Spirit of it: So that (as I have observ'd) could we have sometimes rais'd the one, and sunk the other, they had both been nearer to the Mark. Yet this could not be always objected to them: They had their Intervals of unexceptionable Excellence, that more,

than balanc'd their Errors. The Master-piece of *Booth* was *Othello*: There, he was most in Character, and seem'd not more to animate, or please himself, in it, than his Spectators. 'Tis true he ow'd his last, and highest Advancement, to his acting *Cato*: But it was the Novelty, and critical appearance of that Character, that chiefly swell'd the Torrent of his Applause: For let the Sentiments of a declaiming Patriot have all the Sublimity, that Poetry can raise them to; let them be deliver'd too, with the utmost Grace, and Dignity of Elocution, that can recommend them to the Auditor: Yet this is but one Light, wherein the Excellence of an Actor can shine: But in *Othello* we may see him, in the variety of Nature: There the Actor is carried through the different Accidents of domestick, Happiness, and Misery, occasionally torn, and tortur'd by the most distracting Passion, that can raise Terror, or Compassion, in the Spectator. Such are the Characters, that a Master Actor would delight in; and therefore in *Othello*, I may safely aver, that *Booth* shew'd himself thrice the Actor, that he could in *Cato*. And yet his Merit in acting *Cato* need not be diminish'd by this Comparison.

*Wilks* often regretted, that in Tragedy, he had not the full and strong Voice of *Booth* to command, and grace his Periods with: But *Booth* us'd to say, That if his Ear had been equal to it, *Wilks* had Voice enough to have shewn himself a much better Tragedian. Now though there might be some Truth in this; yet these two Actors were of so mixt a Merit, that even, in Tragedy, the Superiority was not always on the same side: In Sorrow, Tenderness, or Resignation, *Wilks* plainly had the Advantage, and seem'd more pathetically to feel, look, and express his Calamity: But, in the more turbulent Transports of the Heart, *Booth* again bore the Palm, and left all Competitors behind him. A Fact perhaps will set this Difference, in a clearer Light. I have formerly seen *Wilks* act *Othello*, and *Booth* the

the *Earl of Essex*, in which they both miscarried : Neither the exclamatory Rage, or Jealousy of the one, or the plaintive Distresses of the other, were happily executed, or became either of them ; tho' in the contrary Characters, they were both excellent.

When an Actor becomes, and naturally Looks the Character he stands in, I have often observ'd it to have had as fortunate an Effect, and as much recommended him to the Approbation of the common Auditors, as the most correct, or judicious Utterance of the Sentiments : This was strongly visible, in the favourable Reception *Wilks* met with in *Hamlet*, where I own the half of what he spoke, was as painful to my Ear, as every Line, that came from *Betterton* was charming ; and yet it is not impossible, could they have come to a Poll, but *Wilks* might have had a Majority of Admirers : However, such a Division had been no Proof, that the Præminence had not still remain'd in *Betterton* ; and if I should add, that *Booth* too, was behind *Betterton* in *Othello*, it would be saying no more, than *Booth* himself had Judgment, and Candour enough to know, and confess. And if both he, and *Wilks*, are allow'd in the two above-mention'd Characters, a second Place, to so great a Master, as *Betterton*, it will be a Rank of Praise, that the best Actors, since my Time might have been proud of.

I am now come towards the End of that Time, through which our Affairs had long gone forward in a settled course of Prosperity. From the visible Errors of former Managements, we had, at last, found the necessary Means to bring our private Laws, and Orders, into the general Obseivance, and Approbation of our Society : Diligence, and Neglect, were under an equal Eye : the one never fail'd its Reward, and the other, by being very rarely excus'd, was less frequently committed. You are now to consider us in our height of Favour, and so

much in fashion, with the Politer part of the Town, that our House, every *Saturday*, seem'd to be the appointed Assembly of the First Ladies of Quality: Of this too, the common Spectators were so well apprized, that for twenty Years successively, on that Day, we scarce ever fail'd of a crowded Audience; for which Occasion we particularly reserv'd our best Plays, acted in the best manner we could give them.

Among our many necessary Reformati<sup>o</sup>ns; what not a little preserv'd to us the Regard of our Auditors, was the Decency of our clear Stage; from whence we had now, for many Years, shut out those idle Gentlemen, who seem'd more delighted to be pretty Objects themselves, than capable of any Pleasure, from the Play: Who took their daily Stands, where they might best elbow the Actor, and come in for their Share of the Auditors Attention. In many a labour'd Scene of the warmest Humour, and of the most affecting Passion, have I seen the best Actors disconcerted, while these buzzing Muscates have been fluttering round their Eyes, and Ears. How was it possible an Actor, so embarrassed, should keep his Impatience, from entering into that different Temper which his personated Character might require him, to be Master of?

Future Actors may perhaps wish I would set this Grievance, in a stronger Light; and, to say the Truth, where Auditors are ill-bred, it cannot well be expected, that Actors should be polite. Let me therefore shew, how far an Artist in any Science is apt to be hurt by any sort of Inattention to his Performance.

While the famous *Corelli*, at *Rome*, was playing some Musi<sup>c</sup>al Composition of his own, to a select Company in the private Apartment of his Patron-Cardinal, he observed, in the height of his Harmony, his Eminence was engaging, in a detach'd Conversation; upon which he suddenly stop<sup>d</sup> short,

short, and gently laid down his Instrument: The Cardinal, surpriz'd at the unexpected Cessation, ask'd him if a String was broke? To which, *Corelli* in an honest Conscience of what was due to his Musick, reply'd, No, Sir, I was only afraid I interrupted Business. His Eminence, who knew that a Genius could never shew itself to Advantage, where it had not its proper Regards, took this Reproof in good part, and broke off his Conversation, to hear the whole *Concerto* play'd over again.

Another Story will let us see, what Effect a mistaken Offence of this Kind had upon the *French Theatre*; which was told me by a Gentleman of the long Robe, then at *Paris*, and who was himself the innocent Author of it. At the Tragedy of *Zaire*; while the celebrated *Mademoiselle Gossin* was delivering a Soliloquy, this Gentleman was seized with a sudden Fit of Coughing, which gave the Actress some Surprize, and Interruption; and his Fit increasing, she was forced to stand silent so long, that it drew the Eyes of the uneasy Audience upon him; when a *French Gentleman* leaning forward to him, ask'd him, If this Actress had given him any particular Offence, that he took for publick an Occasion to relent it? The *English Gentleman*, in the utmost Surprize, assured him, So far from it, that he was a particular Admirer of her Performance; that his Malady was his real Misfortune, and if he apprehended any Return of it, he would rather quit his Seat, than disoblige either the Actress, or the Audience.

This publick Decency in their Theatre, I have my self seen carried so far, that a Gentleman in their *second Loge*, or Middle-Gallery, being observ'd to sit forward himself, while a Lady sat behind him, a loud Number of Voices call'd out to him, from the Pit, *Place à Dame! Place à Dame!* When the Person so offending, either not apprehending



342 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

hending the Meaning of the Clantour, or possibly being some *John Trott*, who fear'd no Man alive, the Noise was continued for several Minutes; nor were the Actors, though ready on the Stage, suffer'd to begin the Play, till this unbred Person was laugh'd out of his Seat, and had placed the Lady before him.

Whether this Politeness, observ'd at Plays, may be owing to their Clime, their Complexion, or their Government, is of no great Consequence; but, if it is to be acquired, methinks it is Pity our accomplish'd Countrymen, who every Year, import so much of this Nation's gawdy Garniture, should not, in this long Course of our Commerce with them, have brought over a little of their Theatrical Good-breeding too.

I have been the more copious upon this Head, that it might be judg'd, how much it stood us upon, to have got rid of those improper Spectators, I have been speaking of: For whatever Regard we might draw by keeping them at a Distance, from our Stage, I had observ'd, while they were admitted behind our Scenes, we but too often shew'd them the wrong side of our Tapestry; and that many a tolerable Actor was the less valued when it was known, what ordinary Stuff he was made of.

Among the many more disagreeable Distresses that are almost unavoidable, in the Government of a Theatre, those we so often met with from the Persecution of bad Authors, were what we could never intirely get rid of. But let us state both our Cases, and then see, where the Justice of the Complaint lies. 'Tis true, when an ingenious Indigent, had taken, perhaps, a whole Summer's Pains, *invitatâ Minervâ*, to heap up a Pile of Poetry, into the Likeness of a Play, and found, at last, the gay Promise of his Winter's Support, was rejected, and abortive, a Man almost ought to be a Poet himself, to be justly sensible of his Distress! Then,  
indeed,

indeed, great Allowances ought to be made for the severe Reflections, he might naturally throw upon those pragmatistical Actors, who had no Sense, or Taste of good Writing. And yet, if his Relief was only to be had, by his imposing a bad Play upon a good Set of Actors, methinks the Charity that first looks at home, has as good an Excuse for its Coldness, as the unhappy Object of it, had a Plea for his being reliev'd, at their Expence. But immediate Want was not always confess'd their Motive for Writing; Fame, Honour, and *Parnassian* Glory had sometimes taken a romantick Turn in their Heads; and then they gave themselves the Air of talking to us in a higher Strain——Gentlemen were not to be so treated! the Stage was like to be finely govern'd, when Actors pretended to be Judges of Authors, &c. But dear Gentlemen! if they were good Actors, why not? How should they have been able to act, or rise to any Excellence, if you suppos'd them not to feel, or understand what you offer'd them? Would you have reduc'd them, to the meer Mimickry of Parrots, and Monkeys, that can only prate, and play a great many pretty Tricks, without Reflection? Or how are you sure, your Friend, the infallible Judge, to whom you read your fine Piece, might be sincere in the Praises he gave it? Or, indeed, might not you have thought the best Judge a bad one if he had disliked it? Consider too, how possible it might be, that a Man of Sense would not care to tell you a Truth, he was sure you would not believe! And, if neither *Dryden*, *Congreve*, *Steele*, *Addison*, nor *Farquhar*, (if you please) ever made any Complaint of their Incapacity to judge, why is the World to believe the Slights you have met with from them, are either undeserv'd, or particular? Indeed! indeed, I am not conscious that we ever did you, or any of your Fraternity the least Injustice! Yet this was not all we had to struggle with; to supersede our Right of rejecting, the Recommendation, or rather

344 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

ther Imposition of some great Persons (whom it was not Prudence to disoblige) sometimes came in, with a high Hand, to support their Pretensions; and then, *cout que cout* acted it must be! So when the short Life of this wonderful Nothing was over, the Actors were, perhaps, abus'd in a Preface, for obstructing the Success of it, and the Town publickly damn'd us, for our private Civility.

I cannot part, with these fine Gentlemen Authors, without mentioning a ridiculous *Disgraccia*, that befel one of them, many Years ago: This solemn Bard, who like *Bayes*, only writ for Fame, and Reputation; on the second Day's publick Triumph of his Muse, marching in a stately full bottom'd Perriwig into the Lobby of the House, with a Lady of Condition in his Hand, when raising his Voice to the Sir *Fopling* Sound, that *became the Mouth of a Man of Quality*, and calling out—*Hey! Box-keeper, where is my Lady such-a-one's Servant*, was unfortunately answer'd, by honest *John Trott*, (which then happen'd to be the Box-keeper's real Name) Sir, we have dismiss'd, there was not Company enough to pay Candles. In which mortal Astonishment, it may be sufficient to leave him. And yet had the Actors refus'd this Play, what Resentment might have been thought too severe for them?

Thus was our Administration often censured for Accidents, which were not in our Power to prevent: A possible Case, in the wisest Governments. If therefore some Plays have been preferr'd to the Stage, that were never fit to have been seen there, let this be our best Excuse for it. And yet, if the Merit of our rejecting the many bad Plays, that press'd hard upon us, were weigh'd against the few, that were thus imposed upon us, our Conduct, in general, might have more Amendments of the Stage to boast of than Errors to answer for. But it is now Time to drop the Curtain.

During

During our four last Years, there happen'd so very little unlike what has been said before, that I shall conclude with barely mentioning those unavoidable Accidents, that drew on our Dissolution. The first, that for some Years had led the way to greater, was the continued ill State of Health, that render'd *Booth* incapable of appearing on the Stage. The next was the Death of Mrs. *Oldfield*, which happen'd on the 23d of *October*, 1730. About the same time too Mrs. *Porter*, then in her highest Reputation for Tragedy, was lost to us, by the Misfortune of a dislocated Limb, from the overturning of a *Chaise*. And our last Stroke was the Death of *Wilks*, in *September*, the Year following, 1731.

Notwithstanding such irreparable Losses; whether, when these favourite Actors, were no more to be had, their Successors might not be better born with, than they could possibly have hop'd, while the former were in being; or that the generality of Spectators, from their want of Taste, were easier to be pleas'd, than the few that knew better; Or that, at worst, our Actors were still preferable to any other Company, of the several, then subsisting; Or to whatever cause it might be imputed, our Audiences were far less abated, than our apprehensions had suggested. So that, though it began to grow late in Life with me; having still Health, and Strength enough, to have been as useful on the Stage, as ever, I was under no visible Necessity of quitting it: But so it happen'd that our surviving Fraternity having got some chimerical, and as I thought, unjust Notions into their Heads, which though I knew they were without much Difficulty to be surmounted; I chose not, at my time of Day, to enter into new Contentions; and, as I found an Inclination in some of them, to purchase the whole power of the Patent into their own Hands; I did my best, while I staid with them, to make it worth their while to come up to my Price; and then patiently sold out my  
Share,

346 *The Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, &c.*

Share, to the first Bidder, wishing the Crew, I had left in the Vessel, a good Voyage:

What Commotions the Stage fell into the Year following, or from what Provocations, the greatest Part of the Actors revolted, and set up for themselves, in the little House, in the *Hay-Market*, lies not within the Promise of my Title-page to relate: Or as it might set some Persons living, in a Light, they possibly might not chuse to be seen in, I will rather be thankful, for the involuntary Favour they have done me, than trouble the Publick, with private Complaints of fancied, or real Injuries.

F I N I S.



BOOKS lately published and sold by the  
Printer hereof.

	l.	s.	d.
<b>T</b> HE Works of J. S. D. D. D. } 1 10 00			
S. P. D. in 6 Vols. 8vo.			
Ditto 6 neat Pocket Vols 12mo.	16	3	
Pope's Works, 3 vols. 12mo.	6	6	
Ditto Letters, 2 Vols.	4	4	
The Turkish Spy, 8 Vols.	17	0	
Rollin's Method of teaching and studying } the Belles Letters, 4 Vols.	11	6	
The Batchelor of Salamanca, or the Me- } moirs of Don Cherubim de la Ronda, containing many delightful Novels, 2 } Vols. By Mr. Le Sage, Author of Gil- Blas, and the Devil upon Two Sticks.	4	4	
History of England and Ireland by way of } Question and Answer.	2	2	
Poems on several Occasions in 8vo. by the } Rev. J. S. D. D. D. S. P. D.	5	5	
Ditto in 12mo.	2	8	
Travels into several remote Nations of the } World. By Capt. Lemuel Gulliver.	2	8	
The Memoirs of Signior Gaudentio di Luc- } ca. Taken from his Confession and Ex- amination before the Fathers of the In- } quisition.	2	8	
The Cupid, a Collection of three hundred } of the most beautiful Love Songs in the English Language, in 12 Parts, suited to 12 different Sorts of Lovers, viz. The Female Lover, the admiring Lover, the slighted Lover, the modest Lover, the constant Lover, the jealous Lover, the tender Lover, the whining Lover, the saucy Lover, the merry Lover, the pressing Lover, and the happy Lover. }	2	2	
Jacob's Law Tables	2	8	
Baron Polnitz's Memorirs, 5 Vols. 12mo.	12	0	
Polite Conversation by Simon Wagstaff, Esq;	1	7	
Walsius's Algebra,	5	5	
Life of Christ	1	6	8
Gib's Architecture	1	7	4

## Catalogue of Books.

Voltaire's Letters concerning the English Nation	2	2
Gordon's Geographical Grammar	5	0
The Life of the Duke of Berwick	3	3
The Ascent of Cyrus the Younger, and the Retreat of the ten thousand Greeks, translated from Xenophon. By John Hawkey, A. B.	5	5
Complete Family Piece, containing many hundred Receipts in Phisick, Surgery, Cookery, Hunting, Hawking, Fishing, Fowling, Husbandry, Gardening, &c.	3	3
Thoughts on Religion, and other various Subjects. By M. Pascal, 8vo.	4	4
Miscellaneous Works of his Excellency Mathew Prior, Esq; in 2 Vols. Vol. I. containing the History of his own Time. Compiled from his own Manuscripts. Revised and signed by himself. Vol. II. containing a new Collection of Poems, consisting of Epistles, Tales, Satyrs, Epigrams, &c. Never before published.	5	5
A Treatise on Tillage: To which is prefixed a Letter from the Revd. Dr. Swift, D. S. P. D. recommending the same.		6
The Pantheon	2	8
Father Paul on Ecclesiastical Benefices and Tythes, with an Account of his Life,	4	4
The Plain Dealer	2	2
Verses on the Death of Dr. Jonathan Swift, D. S. P. D. Written by himself.		6

Just published, Price 9s. 9d.

The Life of Peter I. Emperor of Russia, in three neat Pocket Vols. with Cutts and Maps. And, Speedily will be published,

Rudiments of ancient History, Sacred and Prophane, containing the most material Transactions, which have been recorded for the first 4000 Years from the Creation of the World, to the Birth of Christ.